

# In These Times

INDEPENDENT NEWS & VIEWS

May 2, 1999

## Spring Books

Clinton's Ex-Boy George  
Doug Ireland

Corrupt History  
Marc Herman

Goldman Sachs'  
Bull Market  
Bill Boisvert

Hobohemia Revisited  
Ted Kleine

The Lavender Menace  
Jane Goldman

Attack of the Virgin  
Lisa Miya-Jervis

A New Novelist's  
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Charles Brockden Brown's  
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- 2) CORPORATIONS PROFIT OFF BREAST CANCER
- 3) GENETICALLY ALTERED SEEDS

- 4) RADIOACTIVE METALS IN YOUR HOME
- 5) U.S. SANCTIONS BRING MASS DESTRUCTION
- 6) U.S. SUBVERTS U.N.'S TEST BAN TREATY
- 7) GENE TRANSFER TECHNOLOGY LINKED TO NEW DISEASES

- 8) HOSPITAL MERGERS THREATEN REPRODUCTIVE RIGHTS
- 9) U.S. SUPPORTS DEATH SQUADS IN CHIAPAS
- 10) ACTIVISTS KILLED ON CHEVRON OIL FACILITY

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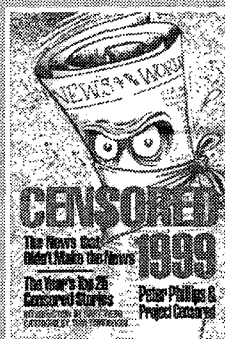
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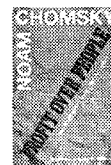


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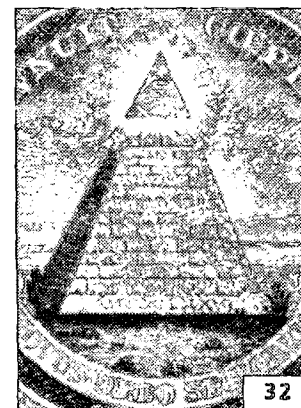
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# Letters

## Root of the Problem?

Ira Shorr missed one very important aspect of defense spending ("Phantom Menace," March 7). All of it is basically useless. With biological, chemical and even nuclear suitcase-size weapons of mass destruction now available to a growing number of agitated groups, we can't purchase security at any price.

We can't stop tons of illegal drugs coming across our border each month. How will we ever stop a determined and half-way creative terrorist from importing some Ebola or smallpox weapon into our crowded cities? In fact, the more we build up invincible, traditional defenses, the more we drive antagonistic forces to develop these cheaper covert, non-explosive weapons.

Just about any individual with a basic understanding of high school biology can develop a biological weapon that can be used against any population regardless of their national defenses. Perhaps it's time to re-examine the need for an empowered United Nations and the promise it holds for eliminating the injustices that cause people to want to destroy one another in the first place.

**Chuck Woolery**  
World Federalist Association  
Washington

## Bellwether Bananas

I was pleased to see David Moberg's detailed article on the conflict between the ever stronger European Union and the United States over bananas ("U.S. Trade Policy Goes Bananas," Feb. 21).

Fruit aside, this battle of the behemoths bids fair to be the major story of the next decade. Brussels and Washington already are squabbling over barley, beef, aircraft, cell phones and cinema, with the specter of a destructive "trade war" lurking ominously in the background.

Just as the conflict between the United States and the Soviet Union during the Cold War dramatically impacted domestic politics, this E.U.-U.S. battle, along with tension between the United States and Japan and the United States and China, likewise will have more than a ripple effect on these shores. Unfortunately, most progressive publications have been studiously inattentive to these developments, which only increases the importance of Moberg's article. I hope that you will pay close attention to these questions as they unfold in coming months.

**Gerald Horne**  
Institute of African-American Research  
University of North Carolina  
Chapel Hill, N.C.

## Moberg's Moxie

Several weeks ago, President Clinton cautioned, "We have got to find a way to facilitate the movement of money ... in a way that avoids these dramatic cycles of boom and then bust, which have led to the collapse of economic activity in so many countries around the world." May I suggest that *In These Times* readers help Clinton out by sending him copies of David Moberg's article, "Global Remedies" (Nov. 29,

## On the Masthead

We are pleased to announce the appointment of Beth Schulman as *In These Times*' new publisher. Beth joined the magazine as associate publisher in July 1990, leaving in 1997 to help found the Independent Press Association (IPA), a San Francisco-based consortium of 170 publications (of which *In These Times* was a charter member). For the near future, Beth will be combining her publishing duties with her continuing role as IPA's education director. She will be in touch with many of you as we continue to work on building the reputation and circulation of the magazine.

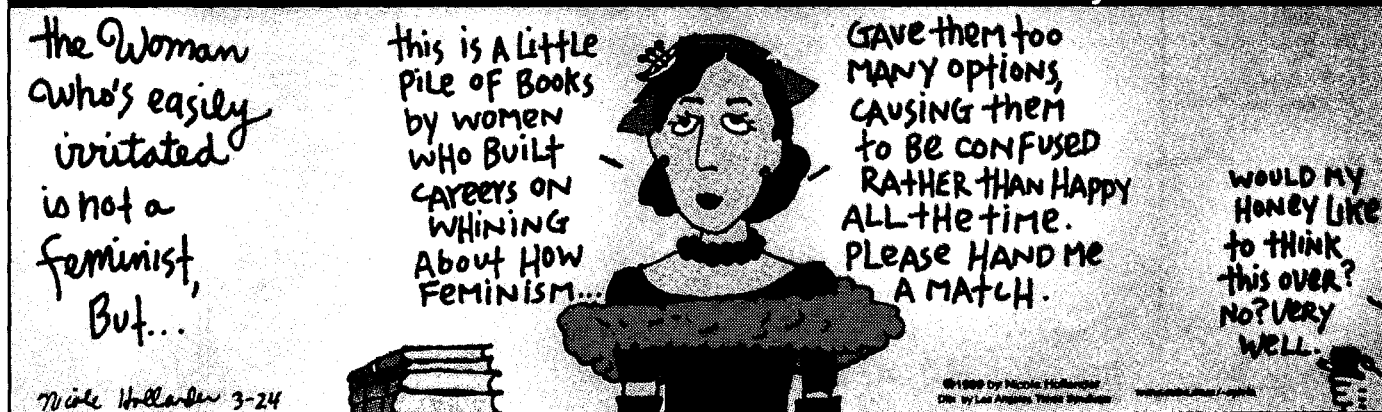
Working with her in a newly revamped business department is Patricia Gray, our former advertising director, who is our new associate publisher. And, joining *In These Times* as circulation director is Christopher Becker, a former editor of *Factsheet Five*, the San Francisco magazine that reviewed the world's zine scene.

1998). Moberg points out, "Capitalism doesn't work well without a strong, effective, democratic government," a fact that seems to have escaped the free marketeers. Belated thanks to Moberg for an important article. His points need to be heard now.

**Anne M. Rice**  
Great Falls, Va.

SYLVIA

By Nicole Hollander





# Clinton's Deadly Blunder

**J**ust about every argument that President Clinton has made to justify NATO's brutal bombing of Yugoslavia is false or fatally wrong-headed.

In announcing the beginning of the bombing campaign, which the president insisted would not lead to an invasion by ground troops, he said that he was acting to prevent a wider war—in his words, “to defuse a powder keg at the heart of Europe that has exploded twice in this century with catastrophic results.” But Clinton is spinning history. This time, as Yale historian John Lewis Gaddis pointed out in the *New York Times*, “It is not violence from a great power but from a small power that fears becoming smaller.” And, he adds, by bombing and threatening to invade, “we have alienated a great power—Russia,” thereby greatly exacerbating tensions that could, once again, have disastrous results.

The president also said that NATO was bombing “to protect thousands of innocent people in Kosovo from a mounting military offensive.” But the bombing has injured, and possibly killed, thousands of innocent Yugoslavs—both ethnic Serbs and ethnic Albanians. And it has been used by the Serbs as a pretext to escalate their attacks on the Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA) and its supporters, forcing hundreds of thousands of ethnic Albanians from the country.

The president argued that Slobodan Milosevic not only has rescinded the partial autonomy granted by former Yugoslav President Tito, but also that he has denied them “their right to speak their language, run their schools, shape their daily lives.” Yet Diana Johnstone, our former European editor who speaks Serbian and who recently returned to Paris from Belgrade, writes that despite “opportunistic” harassment, the Milosevic government never has prevented Yugoslavia from enjoying a strikingly broad range of print media. “I cannot think,” she writes of Belgrade, “of a Western city where scathing criticism of the government is available in print, day after day, at newsstands all over town.” At least until the NATO bombing unleashed the most extreme Serbian nationalists.

“Having seen the various opposition newspapers sold on every major street corner in Belgrade, as well as in provincial towns, having seen the Muslim fundamentalist newspapers on stands in Novi Pazar and the numerous Albanian-language publications in Pristina, it is hard to understand how the myth of ‘no free press in Yugoslavia’ could [have been] maintained.” Indeed, she writes, “The freedom accorded the Albanian-language press in Kosovo, which for years has specialized in promoting the idea that Albanians must have Kosovo to themselves, is quite remarkable.”

Both the Clinton administration and our monolithic media are doing their best to paint Milosevic as another Hitler. They even equate the conflict between Yugoslavia and Kosovo's ethnic Albanians with the Nazi Holocaust—which systematically exterminated millions of Jews, gypsies, homosexuals and Slavs. This is a monstrous distortion that shows the moral depravity of President Clinton (and his loyal media) at its worst.

It is probably true that Milosevic's attempts to eradicate the KLA were responsible for the escalation of fighting in Kosovo. A year ago, he ordered an attack on Prekaz, a town where founders of the KLA were holed up along with dozens of armed supporters. In that attack more than 50 people were killed, nearly half of them women and children, and, in the aftermath, the KLA suddenly gained an immense following.

But the KLA, as even senior American diplomats have acknowledged, was itself a “terrorist group” of old-line Marxist-Leninists (originally bankrolled by Albania's arcane Stalinist leaders). Its goal is to free Kosovo of all ethnic Serbs (Kosovo already had become 90 percent Albanian). And the KLA has conducted its own vicious terrorist attacks to attain that end. These are now the allies for whom we are bombing Yugoslavia.

**By choosing war over continued diplomacy and negotiation, the United States and NATO have ensured that whichever side wins, one way or the other, thousands of Serbs and Albanians will die and Kosovo will be ethnically cleansed.**

Clinton insists that the United States and our NATO allies do not want to see an independent Kosovo. He doesn't say so, but creating an independent Kosovo for the ethnic Albanians would set a precedent and create nothing but trouble for the administration's relations with Turkey, given that NATO ally's own oppressed ethnic minority, the Kurds.

NATO has created conditions under which nothing other than an independent Kosovo, cleansed of Serbs, now seems possible. The alternative is that Clinton willingly suffer the humiliating admission that NATO has made a terrible blunder, and leave Kosovo in Milosevic's hands.

By choosing war, rather than pursuing continued diplomacy and negotiation, the United States and NATO have ensured that whatever happens, many thousands of Serbs and Albanians will have lost their lives, and that whichever side wins, one way or the other, Kosovo will be ethnically cleansed.

J.W.



# Downtown Jerry Brown

By James B. Goodno  
OAKLAND, CALIF.

If Jerry Brown's first months as mayor are any indication, his reign in this racially diverse and economically distressed city will be every bit as controversial as his tenure as California's governor. Brown has already crossed swords with historic preservationists, state and regional transportation planners and anti-military activists. More importantly, he has been clumsy in his dealings with neighborhood groups and his bold plan to reorganize the city government has drawn fire from Oakland's black establishment.

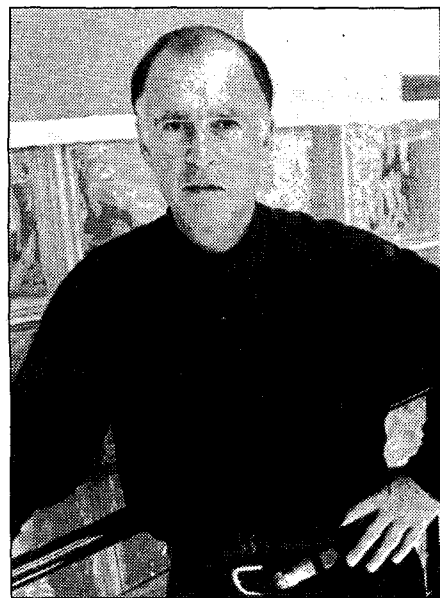
That Brown quickly generated controversy is not surprising. A newcomer to Oakland, Brown moved into a waterfront-area loft in the mid-'90s. From there, he ran a nonprofit group and hosted a radio show on Pacifica, melding his populist politics and new age interests. Although his local involvement was limited at first, Brown hatched the idea that he alone could fix Oakland's problems.

Armed with a strong personality, a facile mind and a penchant for adopting controversial, iconoclastic

stands, Brown rushed headlong into Oakland politics early last year. At first, he offered an imaginative vision of Oakland as an ecological city, drawing inspiration from Italian hill towns. Ridiculed in the press, Brown quickly dropped allusions to medieval Tuscan villages and turned to more practical matters—his bid for mayor.

Fame and a promise to turn Oakland around swept him to an overwhelming victory. Brown pledged to improve public safety and the crumbling school system, attract 10,000 new residents to downtown housing and use his national prominence to lure new investment, particularly high-tech start-ups. His campaign rejected large donations and focused on direct contact with voters. He scored a huge win in the spring primary and—citing his bold agenda—then successfully campaigned to increase mayoral power.

From the start, Brown's relations with leaders of Oakland's largest constituency—the African-American community—were troubled. Brown ran an insurgent campaign against an

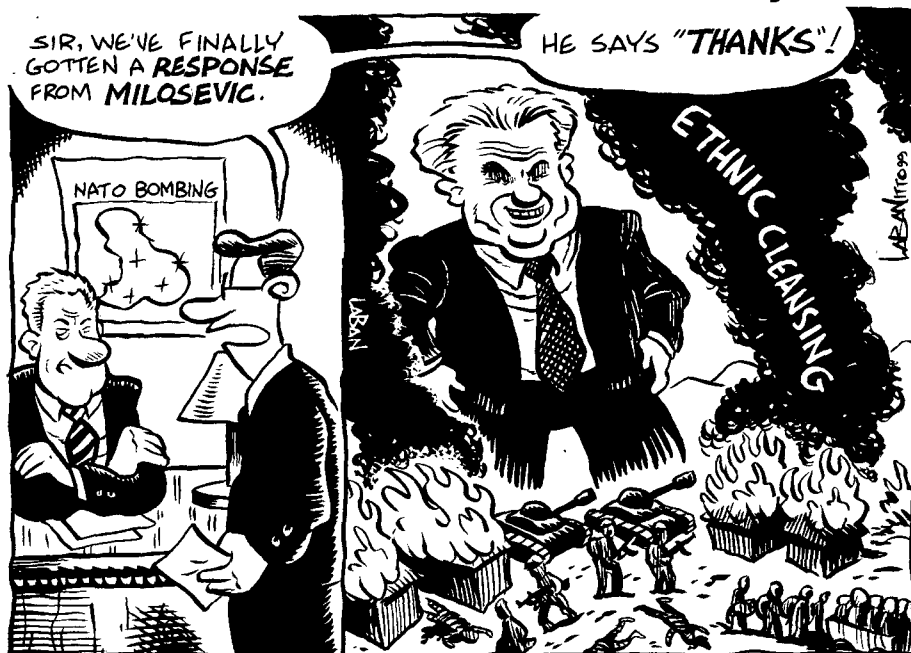


Jerry Brown, Oakland's savior?

establishment that he said had failed the city. For 20 years, Oakland's political establishment was largely African-American. In recent years, however, their power eroded as they lost control of the local daily newspaper and several elected offices. Brown's candidacy established him as a major threat to the black leadership's remaining hold on city power and its claim to represent the African-American community. Indeed, one of the reasons Brown won was the prevailing view that the black establishment was not serving the community well. (Last year, for example, a \$4.2 million grant program for youth outreach groups delivered just \$227,900 to groups in predominantly black neighborhoods.)

In February, Brown announced plans to dismiss department heads who were not committed to his agenda—including Oakland's first African-American police chief, Joseph Samuels Jr. Samuels has strong ties to the black leadership and could point to a steady—though not always dramatic—drop in violent crime during his tenure. Religious leaders and others in the city's African-American establishment voiced strong support for Samuels, but their efforts failed; he turned in his forced resignation on March 25. Brown is also supporting state legislation that would strip administrative power from the black-

## Terry LaBan





led school board. These racially charged battles have pivoted on Oakland's infamous reputation as a crime-ridden city and the academic failures of its schools—major obstacles to Brown's agenda.

In other cases, Brown—who sees himself as a national avatar of a new urban revival—has shown a strong tendency to put policies he considers good for Oakland above placating local power brokers and activists. He supported the replacement of an old commercial block with a new Gap store despite outcry from historic preservationists. He also invited the military to conduct urban war games in Oakland (and inject a quick infusion of cash into the local economy) despite heated opposition from anti-military activists.

Even his relations with neighborhood groups got off to an awkward start. His goals for neighborhoods sound good enough: Plan, develop and revitalize communities with maximum citizen input. In the field, however, the lifelong politician appears to be learning the ropes. At a recent community meeting, Brown ignored residents' concerns and lectured about the importance of buying a home. "He might be right," noted a slightly exasperated organizer. "But it was not an appropriate message for this meeting."

In his dealings with a potentially troublesome City Council, Brown has shown considerable political acumen—he backed a bid for Council president by Oakland's most powerful Latino politician and otherwise wooed potential foes to his side. Yet in refusing to play ball with the black establishment and stumbling in his relationships with neighborhood groups, he is pursuing a potentially hazardous course. Should Brown fail to deliver the goods, racially charged dissent could undermine Oakland's efforts at social progress.

"This city is going white," said the Rev. Lorenzo Carlisle as he joined a small group of protesters at a recent City Council hearing. "It hurts my heart." Before Brown, that's something that wouldn't have been heard around here. ■

James B. Goodno edits *Urban Ecology*, an Oakland-based planning and urban affairs magazine.

# The Mod Squad

By Jane Slaughter  
DETROIT

**T**he auto industry is known for fads, some disastrous, some pacesetters for the rest of the manufacturing world. Detroit has led the way to the assembly line, robots, contract concessions, labor-management cooperation and lean production. This year the buzzword here is "modular," the ultimate in outsourcing. One industry magazine calls modular assembly "the Automotive New World Order."

"Modular" means that hundreds of suppliers no longer will transport thousands of parts to assembly plants every day. Instead, the Big Three will contract with a "first-tier supplier" to deliver a big chunk of the automobile—a module—pre-assembled. The advantage? The modules can be constructed by workers paid far less than unionized Big Three workers.

Modular systems are already up and running in a French minicar factory and in Brazilian factories owned by Volkswagen, DaimlerChrysler and General Motors. Thus far, the most advanced version is at VW's truck and bus plant in Resende, Brazil. This new plant is the dream-come-true of J. Ignacio Lopez, the self-styled "warrior" who taught GM how to bully suppliers into price cuts, and then bolted for VW with his vision in a cardboard box.

At Resende, suppliers operate inside the plant with their areas marked off by yellow lines on the floor. As the chassis moves along the main line, each supplier assembles its components nearby. Workers from one company install the gas tank, transmission lines and steering box; workers from another add the axles and brakes; a third company installs the wheels. This is all work traditionally done by VW employees, but the supplier workers earn about a third of what VW, Ford or Mercedes workers in Brazil's manufacturing capital, Sao Paulo, are paid.

Modular's North American beachhead is Project Yellowstone, GM's plan to replace its small car plants and make them profitable. Through Yellowstone, GM wants to go modular at Saturn and at plants in Ramos Arizpe, Mexico; Ingersoll,

Ontario; Lansing, Mich.; and Lordstown, Ohio. The company already has negotiated a new contract with the Canadian Auto Workers (CAW) and is asking two United Auto Workers (UAW) locals for work rule changes, dangling the promise of brand-new—but much smaller—plants in Lansing and Lordstown.

Bill Caroline, a 33-year Lordstown employee, says GM envisions massive job

*Continued on page 6*

## Etc.

### Biofeedback

In an important victory for environmentalists, a federal judge has derailed Yellowstone National Park's plans to sell its biological resources to a private company.

In August 1997, Yellowstone officials struck a deal with Diversa, a San Diego-based biotechnology firm, allowing the company to harvest microscopic organisms from the park and develop them for commercial use (see "Patent Pending," May 31, 1998). The arrangement drew the ire of environmentalists, who feared the widespread commercialization of the national park system. They also objected to backroom nature of the deal, which skirted the normal public review process and kept the financial details secret. In March 1998, several small environmental groups filed suit, seeking a permanent injunction against the deal and a court order for an environmental impact assessment.

This march, U.S. District Court Judge Royce Lamberth suspended the deal, pending an assessment and public comment. Although the decision did not permanently outlaw such deals, it effectively froze the park's negotiations for similar arrangements with as many as 18 other companies.

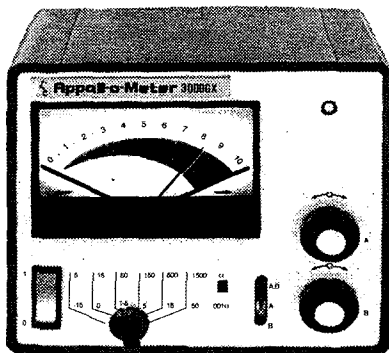
C.A.

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# Appall-o-Meter

By David Futrelle



## Bomb Appetit! 7.1

In an explosive development in the world of food processing, a company called Tenderwave has invented a new way to tenderize meat—using dynamite. The company's "food technologists" merely load up a 7,000-pound steel tank with water and meat, and dynamite charges do the rest. "When the dynamite goes off, about two feet from the meat, the shock waves travel through the water and tear certain muscle proteins in the meat," reports *The Futurist* magazine. "The total force can reach as high as 40,000 pounds per square inch, yet the process doesn't damage or discolor the meat,

and it works evenly throughout an entire piece." An added bonus: The new technique is a real time-saver, allowing Tenderwave to "tenderize 600 pounds of meat, the equivalent of three boned steers, in a few thousandths of a second."

## Branded 5.2

Wondering if your significant other is cheating on you? Don't hire a private detective or call Ken Starr. Just check out their favorite brands. If they drink Pepsi, chances are they're not quite as faithful as they appear, according to a new study by DiMassimo Brand Advertising, a New York agency that recently surveyed 1,500 Americans about brand preferences and marital loyalty. The results? According to *Business Week*, the survey (which was limited to seven brands) discovered that some 59 percent of Pepsi drinkers had been unfaithful—while a whopping 70 percent of Chase Manhattan users had strayed. Meanwhile, fans of Gap jeans and

Hershey chocolate bars were unfaithful only 19 percent and 12 percent of the time, respectively.

## Lazy Bums 7.3

After substituting for Matt Lauer on NBC's *Today Show*, millionaire news anchor Tom Brokaw found himself a little envious of the homeless people he saw sleeping on the New York City streets as he walked to work in the very early morning. "You



feel great sympathy for them," he observed, "but you also envy the extra hour of sleep that they're getting."

Continued from page 5

cuts there. The company wants to build a new assembly plant staffed by 1,980 hourly workers, down from the current 5,800. Nearby, a building would be erected to house suppliers, employing another 2,000 workers.

That's bad enough, says Caroline, but equally ominous are the planned wage scales. GM is pressuring 3,000 workers to retire. Those who don't would be eligible to work for the supplier factory, where their wages would drop to \$14 an hour from their current \$21. Meanwhile, to continue operating the old plant until the new one is built, the company would hire interim employees with no job rights at \$11 an hour.

In Lordstown, union leaders desperate to keep at least some jobs in their city were willing to accept GM's demands. But the UAW International stepped in and broke off negotiations. The union is keeping mum on the whole subject of modular, but it's clear that President

Steve Yokich wants a uniform, national approach to the problem, rather than seeing each local cut its own deal—and underbid each other.

National contracts with the Big Three will expire on Sept. 14. In talks this summer, Yokich will ask the Big Three to pressure their module suppliers to recognize the union. This would be a shortcut, top-down method of organizing that would keep UAW membership numbers up.

GM executives, at least, have indicated a willingness to see their suppliers unionize. But management at those companies may not be so happy to sign on. GM awarded the largest single contract for Yellowstone to Magna International, a firmly anti-union supplier. Of its 83 facilities in the United States and Canada, not one is unionized.

The UAW may need other strategies for organizing the thousands of supplier workers. One possible approach was used

by the CAW a few years ago at a plant in St. Catharines, Ontario. When GM sold a chunk of the complex to a new supplier, the union insisted that St. Catharines was still one facility covered by GM's contract. Today, the workers continue to be GM employees, draw a GM paycheck and work under the same contract as before. Workers in unionized module plants also could use their clout to help nonunion workers' organizing drives. A strike in a module plant instantly shuts down at least one Big Three assembly plant and union workers could strike to back up the nonunion workers' demands.

UAW leaders doubtless would prefer a quiet, back-door solution to maintaining membership numbers—one that uses corporate power rather than union power. The next few years will be crucial in determining which side takes advantage of the changes modular brings. ■

Jane Slaughter is a labor writer in Detroit.



# Swords and Pens in Northern Ireland

**O**ld news is too often just that. Consider the accusation that British police forces in Northern Ireland have collaborated with loyalist paramilitary gangs to threaten—and eliminate—Irish nationalists and their advocates.

The allegation has been around for decades. Despite several investigations, it never has been accepted by the authorities. And it's still one the press covers softly. Perhaps that's because of what happens to reporters who try to do more.

On March 15, Rosemary Nelson, a prominent Northern Irish lawyer, was killed in a sophisticated car-bomb attack. The 40-year-old mother of three represented, among others, the residents of Portadown's Garvaghy Road, where triumphalist loyalist marches have triggered violence year after year.

Nelson visited the United States last year to tell Congress how she had been shaken and verbally abused by police during the 1997 Garvaghy Road conflict. In an interview, she talked to me about the death threats she received and the terror her clients endured at the hands of the Royal Ulster Constabulary (RUC), the Northern Irish police. Recently, police had taunted one of her clients during interrogation. When he mentioned his lawyer was Nelson, one officer scoffed. "Don't bother with her," he said. "She won't be around long enough to represent you in court."

Less than a year later, Nelson was dead. The Red Hand Defenders, an upstart loyalist death squad, claimed responsibility.

Ten years ago it was Patrick Finucane, another Northern Irish human rights attorney. In February 1989, two masked men with sledgehammers broke into his home and shot him 14 times in front of his wife and three kids. The Ulster Freedom Fighters claimed credit, but to date, British authorities have charged no one.

Like Nelson, Finucane had thorned the side of the British security forces, successfully suing the police for assault

and forcing them to release an IRA member after proving he was unlawfully detained and abused. Finucane also received threats from the RUC delivered through his clients. In one case, an officer told a client named Brian



Gillen that it would be better if Finucane "were dead than defending the likes of you."

Journalists who have tried to cover the story have found it can wreck your career. Filmmaker Sean McPhilemy's 1991 documentary about the Finucane assassination featured a participant in alleged meetings between police officers and loyalist terrorists. The RUC ordered him to identify his source, but he and his producers, the British TV station Channel Four, refused. They were fined \$150,000 in a London court.

Then British police raided the home of McPhilemy's researcher, seizing documents pertaining to the investigation. The lives of McPhilemy, his editor and his director were so endangered that Channel Four relocated them for a year. In 1992, when a Belfast lawyer identified in the documentary sued the filmmakers again, Channel Four settled, leaving McPhilemy the sole defendant, his professional standing in rags.

Seven years later, McPhilemy corroborated his original charges and won a libel suit of his own, proving the London *Sunday Express* had attacked his integrity as part of a police effort to discredit him by placing stories in the press. His book, *The Committee*, was published last February and immediately became a best-seller. But even market

success was no match for the power of intimidation. A month after publication, two Ulster businessmen McPhilemy alleged were involved in police collusion lodged a \$100 million libel suit against him and his American publisher, Roberts Rinehart. The suit dissuaded Rinehart from publishing in Ireland or the United Kingdom (where the libel laws are stricter). But British journalists are watching the McPhilemy case closely—in the meantime they're barely covering the story.

While Northern Ireland is trying to map a future, mainstream coverage emphasizes the question of demobilizing the IRA. But Nelson's killing added to the pressure for fundamental reform of the RUC. Now is no time for reporters to wait and see.

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You meet a lot of good people reporting for Pacifica Radio. Sadly, too many of them aren't around very long.

**British journalists are watching the McPhilemy case closely—in the meantime they're barely covering the story.**

Pacifica's New York station, WBAI, has remained independent in no small part thanks to program director Samori Marksman. He died of a heart attack on March 23 at 51.

Marksman fought like a warrior to maintain a place for airing stories—like Nelson's—that the profit-motivated media wouldn't touch. He gave all of us—programmers, guests, listeners—an open home for courageous voices in an increasingly timid media world. We miss him. ■

*Laura Flanders is former news director of Pacifica Network News and former women's desk director of FAIR. She is the author of Real Majority, Media Minority: The Costs of Sidelining Women in Reporting.*



# Justice Lost in the Bermuda Triangle

**O**n the morning of Oct. 13, 1976, the commander of the merchant ship *Sylvia Ossa* radioed the U.S. Coast Guard that his vessel, which was carrying iron ore from Brazil to Philadelphia, had hit heavy seas about 140 miles west of Bermuda.

The ship, a 590-foot World War II-era vessel chartered in Brazil but controlled by a shadowy labyrinth of New York companies, was never heard from again. Rescue boats crisscrossed the area over the next few days but could find no trace of the ship, except for a few unused life vests, all bundled together, and an uninflated life raft.

The *Sylvia Ossa* went down in ocean lore as yet another mystery of the notorious Bermuda Triangle, its crew of poor Brazilian and Uruguayan seamen virtually erased from memory.

But family members of the dead men never gave up their quest for answers. For the past 22 years, 15 widows and 45 children of the seamen have been battling in the New York courts for justice. Everyone knows that the courts can be slow, but 22 years must be some kind of record.

That this case is still alive at all can be attributed to, or blamed on, Kenneth Heller, a dogged 69-year-old lawyer. Heller, who specializes in maritime law, is a gruff but wily former merchant seaman. Over the years, he has created legal nightmares for scores of shipping companies accustomed to exploiting their workers, many of whom are often illiterate and unschooled on their rights.

In the case of the *Sylvia Ossa*, Heller has documented an appalling history of major mechanical breakdowns that plagued the aging ship in the years and months before it disappeared. "That ship was an iron coffin waiting to sink," he says.

While the ship was chartered in Brazil and flying a Panamanian flag, Heller insists that it was covered by U.S. shipping law because it was controlled by companies owned by both Americans and Brazilians who resided in New York.

Court briefs charge that the ship's owners not only sent their crew out in an unseaworthy vessel, but they failed to pay their Social Security taxes or provide proper compensation to the widows and orphans from Uruguay and Brazil that Heller represents.



"At least 10 of the widows claim they never received a penny from the companies," Heller says. He estimates that unearned wages, unpaid Social Security benefits and penalties add up to a minimum of \$45 million.

Joseph Stearns, attorney for one of the companies, Omnium Transportation Co., rejects Heller's allegations but refuses to comment directly on the case. He does claim, however, that Heller has a history of dragging out civil cases in court for years.

"The ship owner did the right thing," adds Thomas Stiles, attorney for another group of companies in the suit, Frota Oceanica Brasileira and S.A. Fernando Frota. "They settled this case fairly, and they settled it quickly in 1977."

Stiles is referring to affidavits from a South American attorney, which state that all widows were compensated for their husbands' deaths and signed releases. But that lawyer—who represented the labor recruiter in Uruguay, not the families—never provided the actual signed releases, and he is now dead. Heller says only a handful of his clients received any money, and he has submitted affidavits from the widows, many of whom are now sick or elderly, stating that they never

signed any documents or were properly informed of their legal right to sue in American courts.

Earlier this year, Judge Franklin Weissberg ordered Heller to bring the widows up from Brazil and Uruguay to be deposed. Weissberg's order contravened a 10-year-old ruling in the case by a previous judge that the widows could be deposed in their home country—something that company lawyers have resisted. "They want all of them to come here for depositions, then return home, then come back later for trial," Heller says. "That's an unfair burden on these women when the companies have had 22 years to take their depositions—but that's how seamen always get treated."

In March, Heller flew to Uruguay, found the seven surviving widows too sick to travel on such short notice, and instead brought up eight of the now grown children for the

**Heller has created legal nightmares for scores of shipping companies accustomed to exploiting their workers, many of whom are illiterate and unschooled on their rights.**

depositions. The opposing lawyers demanded the widows' immediate appearance or a dismissal of the case. The judge, clearly siding with the companies, said he would welcome their motion for dismissal and will issue a ruling in May.

Twenty-two years after the *Sylvia Ossa* sank, no one in our court system seems to care what happened, who was responsible or whether justice was done. ■

*Juan Gonzalez, who also writes for New York's Daily News, won the 1998 George W. Polk Award for commentary.*



# A Healthy Chance

By Linda Lutton

CHICAGO

**W**hen Illinois state Rep. Mike Boland introduced a constitutional amendment in January 1998 that would require the state to come up with a plan for universal health coverage for all Illinois residents, many of his colleagues thought he was nuts. "I only had three or four co-sponsors," says Boland, a Democrat from East Moline. "Everybody thought it was kind of pie in the sky."

Everybody, that is, except the voters. Boland and other supporters got the Bernardin Amendment—named for Chicago's popular Archbishop, Cardinal Joseph Bernardin, an outspoken proponent of universal health care who died in 1996 after a long, often public battle with cancer—on the ballot as an advisory referendum this past November in Cook County, where around half of Illinois' 12 million residents live. Eighty-three percent of voters approved it. "Suddenly I have 31 co-sponsors," Boland says.

After the encouraging results of the Cook County vote, Boland, former state Treasurer Pat Quinn and Dr. Quentin Young, the immediate past president of the American Public Health Association and a popular local radio host, launched a grass-roots campaign to put the Bernardin Amendment on township ballots across the state. On April 13, voters in another 100 communities—with a total population of 1.5 million—will have a chance to voice their opinions on the measure. Boland says his goal will be to see 60 percent of voters approve the measure, the amount needed to ratify an amendment once it has passed the state House and Senate. But others are more confident that the results in this round's traditionally Republican communities will come close to largely Democratic Cook County's. "I think we'll do about as well downstate as we did upstate," Young says. "In Cook County we broke down the election results by legislative district, and the lowest vote in any part of the county was 70 percent—which in its own right is a landslide—and the highest was 97 percent."

## THE BERNARDIN AMENDMENT

**Shall the Illinois General Assembly ...  
establish health care as a basic right of  
every person in our state?**



PHOTO: TIM ZIELENBACH/AFP

Those kinds of numbers have health care reform advocates around the nation watching the Bernardin Amendment—and the referendum strategy its supporters are implementing—to see whether a viable tactic might be emerging for enacting universal health coverage at the state level. Supporters even see this as a possible route to a future national system of coverage. "While we are unrelenting in our desire for a national system, knowing that would maximize the benefits of fiscal savings and standardization—one quality of care for all people—there's nothing in our book that says trying it in one state is regressive," says Young, who is also national chairman of Physicians for a National Health Program. He points out that Canada took a similar route to national health coverage. "We think it would immediately get the focus of the nation and we would expect other states to try it, and sooner rather than later we would achieve the much desired goal of national uniform health insurance."

To take effect, the Bernardin Amendment would need to pass both the Illinois House and Senate with a three-fifths majority and then be put to the public—perhaps as early as the 2000 general election. But despite indications of overwhelming public support, the same forces that derailed attempts at national health care reform—most notably a powerful insurance industry lobby—are present in Illinois.

**Will Illinois make health care a constitutional right?**



"It's going to be a long, drawn-out battle," Boland admits, "but I think it's doable."

In the last years of his life, Bernardin wrote and preached extensively on health care issues. "He defined a very powerful ethical position, arguing from the moral viewpoint that health care is so essential to human dignity that it is society's responsibility to see that everybody has access to decent health care," Young says. "He wrote very effectively and profoundly about the incompatibility of for-profit enterprise in the delivery of health care, and in that way was a voice at the time when the American health system was hurtling toward a market system."

Bernardin forbade Catholic hospitals in the archdiocese from joining any for-profit chain, under penalty of being denied the right to use "Catholic" in their hospital title. "Health care is an essential safeguard of human life and dignity, and there is an obligation for society to ensure that every person be able to realize this right," Bernardin said in a 1994 address to the National Press Club in Washington. "The only way this obligation can be effectively met by society is for our nation to make universal health care coverage a reality."

Upon his death, Bernardin's writings were reviewed by several leaders in the medical community, including his own personal physician, and eventually several phrases were shaped by Quinn and Boland into the constitutional amendment. The question on the ballot reads: "Shall the Illinois General Assembly enact the Bernardin Amendment, which would establish health care as a basic right of every person in our state and establish May 31, 2002 as the deadline to enact a plan for universal health coverage that permits everyone to obtain decent health care on a regular basis?"

The amendment campaign clearly plays on the tremendous popularity of Bernardin himself. Organizers admit if this was the "Health Care for All" amendment, they probably wouldn't have this level of support—but Quinn says that's fair game. "What better symbol of one of the great moral crusades of our time?" he asks. "The civil rights movement had to have Martin Luther King, because he was the leader and he embodied what it was all about. And in many respects that's what Cardinal Bernardin is—for decent health care for everybody."

The strategy of putting the question before voters—even when the vote is nonbinding—has become crucial in this fight. "I truly believe that the power of referendum is the key to letting the voice of the everyday person be heard," Quinn says. "The lobbyists always get heard, but the great mass of voters often gets ignored because they don't have a chance

to express themselves. We're doing it at the ballot box, and there's no better way to speak to politicians."

Quinn and Boland teamed up on two other successful grassroots referendum campaigns. One led to the creation of the Illinois Citizens Utility Board, a watchdog group; the other reduced the size of the Illinois legislature. "I think there are a number of issues, particularly in the area of health care, where the voters are far ahead of elected officials at demanding reform, but the elected officials are in gridlock," Quinn says. "I think the referendum process is a kind of a crowbar that the voters have to use to get some action."

The amendment has yet to attract its first Republican co-

sponsor, and it will need at least a dozen Republican votes to get through the House. Passing the Senate will be even more challenging. Those opposed to the amendment—and the idea of universal health care in general—tend to bring up the issue of who's going to pay for it. "We're paying for it already," Young says. "We can just take the money that's out there and regain the huge administrative costs that are inevitable when you have a multi-

**"People have been  
downscaled and lost  
benefits they once had, and  
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payer system. Beyond that, you get rid of the vast extortion in profits that these agencies are experiencing and the obscene multimillion dollar rewards for their top executives."

In an effort to allay funding concerns, Boland has introduced a companion bill that would earmark the \$361 million in tobacco settlement money Illinois will receive annually to pay for whatever plan comes out of the amendment. Boland acknowledges that he's up against a "strong conservative Republican philosophical bent against this type of thing" (one fellow representative referred to the amendment as Boland's "Communist proposal"). But by demonstrating such strong support among voters, supporters can begin to paint the issue as nonpartisan. "When do 83 percent of the people agree on anything?" Boland asks. "As the pressure from the folks back home grows, some [representatives] that are in more targeted or more vulnerable districts are going to think twice about it."

If the Bernardin Amendment passes, Illinois would be the first state to actually declare health care a constitutional right. It's not totally clear why this activity has taken root here; unanticipated health care costs have become the leading cause of family bankruptcy in the state, but other states are clearly worse off in terms of the number of uninsured. One-fifth of California residents have no insurance; a quarter of Texans are uninsured. In Illinois about 14 percent of the population—1.5 million people—are uninsured, near the national average of 16 percent. And with Republican governors for the past 22 years and a conservative state

Senate, Illinois is certainly no bastion of liberalism.

It's also not the only state where health care reform advocates are trying to pick up the pieces of the derailed national attempt at reform. In Washington state, a broad-based coalition of individuals and community organizations called Health Care 2000 is trying to create a state health care trust fund that would cover all Washington residents. The group has a sponsor in the state Senate for this single-payer plan, who will introduce a bill in January 2000. If it doesn't pass then, a ballot initiative will be launched for the November 2000 elections. A single-payer plan also has been introduced in the Maryland state legislature.

If the Bernardin Amendment is approved by voters, a second fight will immediately ensue. "If it passes, it clearly would be a constitutional right to health care in the state. It equally clearly doesn't describe the form of that; it doesn't say single payer, it doesn't say HMOs, it doesn't say anything," Young says.

Other recent health care initiatives undertaken in Illinois suggest that the state has a lot to learn before it could successfully administer health care to all. Last year, the state expanded Medicaid coverage to children of the working poor through a program called KidCare, but it has been blasted for spending huge sums on administrative costs while signing up only a fraction of the children who actually qualify for the program. Boland says there's no guarantee the state wouldn't bungle a plan that comes out of the Bernardin Amendment, but adds that the universality of whatever plan emerges will aid in administration. The red tape involved in verifying eligibility would presumably be eliminated and there would be no long forms to fill out or process, two things that have held up KidCare.

Most supporters of the Bernardin amendment say its lack of details is a tremendous advantage. "The Bernardin Amendment really gets at the heart of the moral principle, which is that health care is a right," says Ida Hellander, executive director of Physicians for a National Health Program. "The Clinton plan was a really detailed plan, but because there was no general principle set forth that health care is a right, the details of the plan just sunk it."

The Clinton plan was a 1,500-page document written by 500 people that called for universal health care coverage based on giant HMOs competing against each other. Young says that since the plan failed, the health care crisis only has gotten more serious. "At least 10 million more people have shown up on the uninsured rolls," he says. "The national experience is an increase at a rate of 125,000 net new uninsured every month. Perhaps even more significant is the people who do have benefits who are increasingly in despair over the operation of the for-profit HMO and hospital-chain system."

Will the fate of the Clinton initiative befall efforts to pass the Bernardin Amendment? "My feeling is that the American people are at least five years wiser," Young says. "Their experiences have been all adverse, and we have a shot." He says the push for the Bernardin Amendment is beginning to feel like a movement. He points to the growing list of people and organizations that have endorsed the amendment—from retired U.S. Sen. Paul Simon and the March of Dimes to the Chicago Medical Society and the Illinois AFL-CIO.

More importantly, those who have gotten involved in the

campaign at the grass-roots level are evidence of its wide appeal. In conservative Kane County, residents could have simply appealed to the County Board to put the Bernardin Amendment on the ballot; instead they turned in petitions with more than a thousand signatures. "We didn't have anything to do with it," Young says. "We didn't have an office there or a contact—they just did it."

Boland says that he expects atypical activists—white, middle-class, college-educated suburbanites—to mobilize around this issue. "It will be your average working folk, middle-class person that is going to be the key player in this whole fight, because so many of them are living on the edge," he says. "Those people have been downscaled and lost benefits they once had, and that creates a different type of activist, somebody who you might say has had a taste of freedom and then lost it."

Kane County resident Erik Austin, 31, says he's like most of his neighbors—"a Democrat on some issues and a Republican on other issues"—but the fact that he was born with kidney failure, has been denied coverage repeatedly by insurance companies and had to file bankruptcy in college after maxing out his credit cards buying medicine, made him a fan of the Bernardin Amendment. "It suddenly became like an obsession for me," he says. "I've made it my mission to try to get it passed." ■

Linda Lutton is a freelance writer in Chicago.

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*the freedom to work and think  
the freedom to love and aspire*  
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# Medicare's Critical Condition



Congressional leaders and the profit-driven health care industry are planning to end Medicare as we know it.

By Ramón Castellblanch

**H**idden behind the smoke of the impeachment coverage, a proposal to destroy Medicare as a social insurance program quietly has taken shape. As Congress gets down to the business of the federal budget, it is now considering a proposal—backed by the American Medical Association (AMA), for-profit hospital chains and large managed care companies—that would transform the Medicare program into a voucher system. These interest groups are backing a plan to “save” Medicare by destroying its core feature: seniors’ entitlement to it.

Since 1965, the Medicare program has made health insurance affordable for Americans who are 65 years or older or permanently disabled. Today, Medicare pays for hospital care and covers part of the costs for physicians, x-rays, lab work and home health care for 40 million people. Historically, a payroll tax and general federal tax revenues have funded the program. However, it is projected that by 2015 expenditures will exceed income in Medicare’s hospital insurance trust, which is funded by the 2.9 percent payroll tax. As the variables affecting Medicare costs are uncertain, this projection is highly questionable. Still, sometime in the next 10 to 15 years, Medicare will need to take steps to balance its budget.

But the profit-driven health care industry claims that this projection constitutes a crisis that demands immediate, drastic action. It has a plan that would end the federal government’s role as guarantor for seniors’ health insurance costs. Instead, it would give seniors vouchers to buy their own health insurance and shift the burden of health care inflation onto their backs. Medicare hospital insurance would no longer be free and the cost to seniors of both hospital and physician care would no longer be capped, threatening to make Medicare unaffordable for many and leaving millions uninsured.

A “blue ribbon” panel, known as the Bipartisan Commission on the Future of Medicare, tried for a year to agree on a voucher recommendation for Congress, before giving up in March. But the Senate Finance Committee has scheduled hearings on the voucher proposal, hoping to include it as a part of this year’s federal budget. Profit-driven health care is lobbying hard to push the voucher system through Congress and onto the president’s desk. Clinton has called for dramatic action on Medicare this year, and he has

given no indication that he wouldn’t accept a voucher proposal. If Medicare vouchers were adopted, millions of poorer, sicker seniors would be in grave danger of losing their access to health care.

**H**ow did the Medicare program become endangered? Back in the ’80s, the government initiated a policy of restricting what Medicare paid for hospital treatment. Previously, Medicare paid hospitals based on itemized bills, enabling hospitals to run up their charges for Medicare. Medicare developed a hospital payment method known as the Prospective Payment System (PPS), which instituted a flat rate for hospital stays. In 1992, Medicare adopted a “claw-back” payment method for physicians based on a fee schedule (known as the Resource-based Relative Value Studies, or RB-RVS). If physicians try to beat the fee schedule by increasing the number of services they provided, the RB-RVS system reduced the rate that Medicare paid them per service. Using these two methods, Medicare has saved billions. In the past two years, Medicare costs per capita have increased about 1 percent a year. By comparison, the private sector has experienced health care inflation of 7 to 10 percent annually.

At the same time it began restricting hospital payments, Medicare began to pay for managed care programs that covered seniors. Managed care profited heavily from Medicare because it tended to enroll seniors whose health care expenses were below average. As a result, Medicare overpaid managed care between 7 to 10 percent for its services. Yet, by 1995, only 7 percent of seniors had chosen managed care. (Today, managed care enrolls 17 percent of Medicare seniors.) Traditional, fee-for-service Medicare was relatively inexpensive and provided a virtually unlimited choice of physicians.

When the Republicans took over Congress in 1995, cutting Medicare costs was a top priority in their wholesale attack on social programs. Since the RB-RVS and PPS systems were proven tools for cutting Medicare costs, the AMA and for-profit hospitals needed to come up with a different plan that protected their profits. For managed care, the Republican takeover provided a golden opportunity. That year, it was calculated that, if Medicare was changed so that private health insurance could get a 50 percent share of Medicare seniors,

company profits would increase by \$19 billion over the seven-year budget period. Of course, a plan that would provide the potential for massive cuts in Medicare, get more healthy seniors into managed care and reduce government oversight of physician and hospital payment was a tough sell.

The solution, which had been brewing for years at the Heritage Foundation, a right-wing think tank in Washington, was more "competition" for Medicare. Proponents insisted a voucher system would save money and improve care. According to this theory, since individuals were buying their own health insurance, there would be less need for government oversight or fee schedules. Once the voucher system was in place, if health care costs rose, Congress could allow managed care to cut coverage to save money. This would be a lot easier politically than passing bills raising premiums that seniors pay, as Congress must do under the current system when it wants to raise costs for Medicare coverage.

The "competition" logic behind the voucher plan would also serve managed care. Currently, the government requires managed care to pay for many specific treatments for Medicare recipients. A voucher system could leave these requirements to be taken care of by the market. To cut costs, managed care businesses could sell coverage denying payments for many treatments that traditional Medicare covers. Then, the cost of traditional Medicare relative to managed care would increase. Seniors in traditional Medicare would have to pay more for their coverage and many would be forced into managed care.

The voucher idea was first introduced in Congress as part of the Republicans' 1995 budget proposal. This move backfired. The Democrats seized the issue, branding vouchers as a "ticket to disaster" that "could not possibly work." On Dec. 6, President Clinton vetoed the Republican budget, stating that it would "turn Medicare into a second-class system." The Medicare system has served all senior citizens well for 30 years," he said. "It would be over. This budget would end [the] guarantee that no senior citizen ... would be denied medical care."

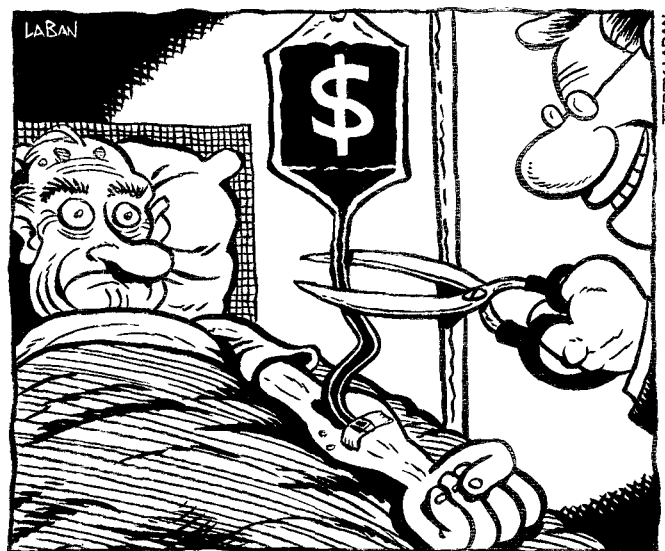
In the 1996 elections, the Democrats tarred the Republicans with their Medicare proposal, helping to turn the 1996 electoral tide toward Clinton. Voucher proponents had to wait until 1997, the next non-election year, for another political opportunity. That year, Congress established the Bipartisan Commission on the Future of Medicare, a 17-member group that was asked to recommend a Medicare plan to Congress by March 1999. The commission, which included nine Democrats and eight Republicans, needed 11 votes to call its recommendation "bipartisan." It was co-chaired by Rep. Bill Thomas (R-Calif.), author of the 1995 Republican Medicare proposal and Sen. John Breaux (D-La.), who already had a record for trying to balance the Medicare budget on the backs of seniors.

When the Bipartisan Commission began its meetings—many of which were held behind closed doors—one of the obvious options for saving Medicare was raising taxes. Indeed, the Congressional Budget Office (CBO) estimated that, without any new cost control measures, raising the Medicare payroll tax from its present 2.9 percent to 4.1 percent would keep the largest part of Medicare, the hospital insurance fund, in balance through the year 2025. But from the start, House Speaker Newt Gingrich worked hard to kill the tax option.

He got Thomas to take a "no new taxes" pledge and convinced Clinton to allow Thomas to co-chair the commission.

More sensible alternatives also were ruled out. In a recent report, the National Campaign to Protect, Improve, and Expand Medicare listed 10 potential revenue sources besides the regressive payroll tax that could be used to balance the Medicare budget. They range from increased corporate taxes to slowing the rise in military spending. Part of the projected federal budget surplus could be used for Medicare. Clinton has proposed using 15 percent of the surplus for Medicare, which would fund the trust through 2027. Medicare could strengthen the RB-RVS system by accelerating the use of the clawback mechanism to resemble the stronger clawback mechanisms used in many other countries. It could strengthen the PPS system by setting tighter caps on what it would pay for hospitals, home health care and nursing homes. Or Medicare payments to managed care businesses could be further tightened to more accurately reflect the health care bills of the seniors enrolled in managed care.

The bipartisan commission was stacked against these alternatives. All eight of its Republican and two of its Democratic members were pro-voucher; both commission co-chairs and its staff director were voucher proponents. In January 1999, Breaux and Thomas endorsed the voucher system—which they called "premium support"—as the recommendation for Medicare that the commission should forward to Congress.



Under the Breaux-Thomas proposal, Medicare would give each eligible senior a voucher worth 88 percent of the weighted average of all Medicare premiums. Currently, Medicare pays about 90 percent. To get health insurance, a Medicare recipient would have to pay the difference between their vouchers and their Medicare premiums out of their own pockets. Traditional Medicare would become a "choice."

While coverage standards for traditional Medicare would still be overseen by the Health Care Financing Administration (HCFA), the coverage standards of managed care would be set by a new Medicare board, which would be less accountable to the public than the HCFA. Traditional



Medicare would be better, but its costs would be higher than managed care. The difference in costs would lead to higher premiums for traditional Medicare, causing increased out-of-pocket expenses for seniors. Higher out-of-pocket expenses would drive healthier seniors, who are less likely to need Medicare's better coverage, into managed care. Managed care would continue to carve out an extra profit by enrolling less-expensive, healthier seniors, but the average person in traditional Medicare would be sicker—making its costs go even higher and its enrollees pay even more.

The Breaux-Thomas proposal also calls for higher deductibles and co-payments. The current deductible for traditional Medicare is \$764 per hospital visit and \$100 for physician services. The new deductible for traditional Medicare would be \$350 for either physician or hospital treatment. The proposal would add new co-payments of 20 percent for the first 20 days of nursing home care and 10 percent for home health care and lab work. The Breaux-Thomas proposal gradually would raise the Medicare eligibility age from 65 to 67. By 2027, as many as 1.4 million seniors would be left without any insurance or be seriously under-insured as a result.

The Breaux-Thomas proposal also would introduce the practice of means-testing into the Medicare program. The proposal would require eligible seniors with incomes over three times the federal poverty level (which is currently around \$11,000 for a single person) to pay extra premiums for Medicare. Those with incomes of more than five times the poverty level would get a voucher worth 73 percent of the weighted average of all premiums. Once means-testing was used to compute vouchers, there would be no limit as to who would have to pay the extra cost for Medicare. Eventually, those with even lower incomes could be required to pay more. The current subsidies for Medicare recipients near or below the poverty line would be continued in some form, and some extremely poor seniors could get vouchers worth more than 88 percent.

In an attempt to win quick White House support, Breaux did propose increased coverage for pharmaceuticals. However, one's income would have to be at or below 135 percent of the federal poverty line to qualify. The vast majority of seniors would continue to pay for drug coverage themselves.

In March, only 10 members of the commission voted for the Breaux-Thomas proposal, falling one vote short of making it "bipartisan." But the Breaux-Thomas proposal moved onto Congress anyway. The Senate Finance Committee has scheduled hearings to begin on April 14. Voucher proponents are hoping to push the measure through Congress and onto the president's desk by this summer. The White House has objected to the paucity of the drug coverage in the Breaux-Thomas proposal and its raising of the Medicare eligibility age to 67. Clinton has insisted that 15 percent of the projected federal budget surplus be allocated to Medicare. But, despite his strenuous objections to the Republican plan in 1995, he has not indicated that he would veto a voucher system. The White House has said it wants a deal this year, long before the 2000 elections, and has promised to produce its own Medicare proposal soon.

Like the White House, many of the supposed advocates for Medicare also appear to be taking a "wait and see" attitude toward vouchers. The American Association of Retired People (AARP) and Families USA have refused to condemn the voucher proposal. This ambivalence could lead to disaster. If Medicare added better pharmaceutical coverage and kept the eligibility age at 65, but still adopted vouchers, it would be like painting the deck of a ship while ripping a hole in its hull. Things might look OK above the surface, but, in the long run, it would sink.

Fortunately, other national senior advocacy groups are flatly rejecting vouchers. The National Council of Senior Citizens, the National Committee to Preserve Social Security and Medicare, and the National Campaign to Protect, Improve, and

Expand Medicare have sounded the alarm. To stop the voucher proposal, people with disabilities, health care professionals, social workers, public interest attorneys, unions and seniors themselves must answer the call. The time to oppose Medicare vouchers is now. If Congress and the White House agree to vouchers, it will most likely occur between now and July. Moderate Democrats, including the president, will be the deciding factor.

The last time Congress adopted a Medicare policy that meant higher premiums for middle- and low-income seniors, in 1988, it was a fiasco. When members of Congress got home that summer they were shocked to find many seniors furious. In the most famous case of voter fury, then powerful Rep. Dan Rostenkowski (D-Ill.) was forced to flee irate seniors—one of them draped on the hood of his car. The next year, Congress repealed the bill. Without the same type of public outrage against vouchers this year, millions of seniors and people with disabilities could be joining the ranks of the uninsured. ■

**Ramón Castellblanch** is director of health care administration programs at Quinnipiac College in Hamden, Conn. He is helping to form the Connecticut Coalition for Medicare. This article was funded in part by a grant from the Puffin Foundation.

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**Medicare vouchers would be like painting the deck of a ship while ripping a hole in its hull. Things might look OK above the surface, but, in the long run, it would sink.**

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# ISRAEL'S IDENTITY CRISIS

BY BENNY MORRIS

## JERUSALEM

For the third time this decade, Israel is facing an election of historic significance. Israelis must choose once more between the way of Benjamin Netanyahu and the Likud Party—holding onto as much of “Greater Israel” and delaying further withdrawals for as long as possible—or the center-left course of further territorial compromise with the Palestinians, Syrians and Lebanese.

In 1992, Israel selected Yitzhak Rabin and the Labor Party over Yitzhak Shamir and Likud, opening the way for the Oslo Accords, the start of Israeli withdrawal from the occupied territories of the Gaza Strip and the West Bank, and the seeds of a Palestinian state. Rabin also initiated a substantive dialogue with Syria, more or less agreeing to a full military withdrawal from the Golan Heights before the Syrians balked at some of the conditions at the last minute. In 1996, after a right-wing extremist had assassinated Rabin in November 1995, Israelis returned to the polls. They elected Netanyahu over Shimon Peres and Labor, leading to the suspension of the Oslo process and talks with Syria and Lebanon.

But this year's elections—with a first round scheduled for May 17 (to vote for the Knesset and the prime minister) and a second round on June 1 (if no candidate for prime minister wins more than 50 percent in round one)—may have even greater importance. Israelis will determine their country's identity and the nature of their society. Will Israel remain predominantly Western-looking, liberal, democratic and secular? Or will it become increasingly Levantine, illiberal and semi-theocratic?

Zionism, founded in Eastern Europe in the 1880s, was essentially a movement of Ashkenazi Jews (those of European descent). From the early 1930s, the Zionist movement was dominated by its socialist wing, headed by David Ben-Gurion. In 1948, when the Yishuv—the Jewish community in Palestine—established the State of Israel, it was 85 percent Ashkenazi and only 15 percent Sephardi (Jews of North African and Middle Eastern descent). It was only after independence that hundreds of thousands of Sephardim began pouring into the country, providing the Herut Party (the

predecessor of Likud) with its foot-soldiers, eventually creating a society more or less finely balanced between its Sephardi and Ashkenazi components.

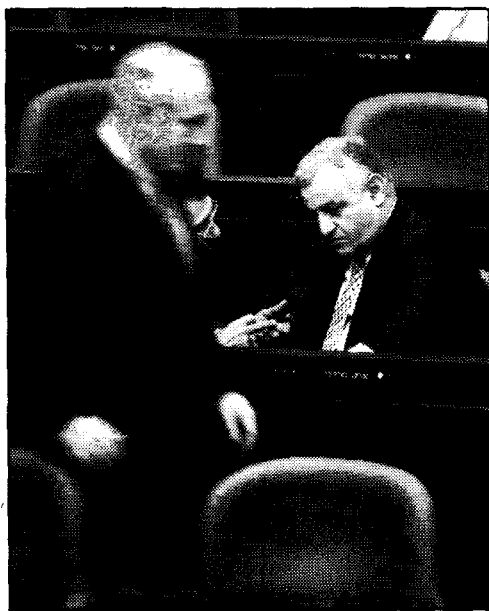
Like previous elections, much will depend on demographic trends, which do not favor the secular-liberal center and left. During Israel's first 30 years, secular Ashkenazim held the demographic edge, and center-left coalitions governed the country under an unbroken chain of Labor prime ministers. In the mid-'70s, Sephardi and religious Jews, who had much higher birth rates than secular Ashkenazim, gained the demographic and electoral edge. Their watershed came in 1977, when the Likud first took power under Menachem Begin. For

most of the past 22 years, Israel has been ruled by Likud prime ministers and Likud-dominated coalitions. The only two breaks were the brief term of Peres from 1984 to 1986, when electoral circumstances forced a Labor-Likud coalition, and from 1992 to 1996, when the Palestinian *Intifada*, American pressure and Shamir's lackluster image tipped the scales in favor of Rabin.

Since Begin was first elected, the right's demographic edge has become more potent, with orthodox and ultra-orthodox families producing on average two or three times as many children as secular Jews. Sephardi Jews, despite a diminishing birth rate, still have more children than secular Ashkenazim, and a

growing number of them are turning (or returning) to orthodoxy and ultra-orthodoxy and voting for Shas, the ultra-orthodox Sephardi party led by Knesset member Aryeh Deri and Rabbi Ovadia Yosef. (The three main religious parties—Shas, the National Religious Party and the Ashkenazi Degel Hatorah—together hold about 20 percent of the seats in

*Continued on page 16*



Benjamin Netanyahu has demographics on his side. But can he slip past his former defense minister, Yitzhak Mordechai?

JIM HOLLANDER/REUTERS



# STATE OF CONFUSION

BY CHARMAINE SEITZ

BIRZEIT, THE WEST BANK

In the spring of 1996, the tiny Palestinian village of Birzeit awoke abruptly to the squawking speakers of patrolling Israeli military jeeps. It was a sound many hadn't heard since the signing of peace agreements between Israeli and Palestinian leaders three years earlier.

An estimated 300 young Palestinian men were blindfolded and herded away by Israeli soldiers. A politically active university town, Birzeit was paying for four recent bombings in Israel by Palestinian militants. Trying to calm the anger of Israeli voters, then Prime Minister Shimon Peres had responded with large-scale arrests and a show of force. Twenty-four hours later, most of the students were quietly returned to their homes, unwitting campaign participants in an Israeli election year.

This spring, Palestinians find themselves doing a similar dance. As non-Israeli citizens, West Bank and Gaza have no vote in the election for prime minister on May 17, but they can have a great affect on the results.

The government of hard-line, Likud Party Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu fell after he signed the Wye agreement last October, promising a further withdrawal from the West Bank and angering his right-wing coalition partners. Since then, he has done his best to bring them back into the fold by starting at least 13 new settlements in the occupied territories, stalling on the withdrawals and reigniting the debate over Jerusalem's status. Netanyahu claims that "what is holding up the implementation of Wye are Palestinian violations."

"We believe that Israeli election campaigns should not be used as a reason to delay implementation of accords,"

responds Nabil Abu Rdaineh, a political adviser to Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat. Since last year, Arafat has been promising his people that he will declare an independent Palestinian state when the Oslo Accords expire on May 4—13 days before Israelis go to the polls. But Palestinian legislator Hanan Ashrawi says that a declaration of statehood would only allow Netanyahu to "revive the politics of



PAOLO COCCO/REUTERS

**Yasser Arafat is looking for all the help he can get on May 4.**

**Labor Party candidate Ehud Barak is hoping to do better against Netanyahu than former Prime Minister Shimon Peres.**



JIM HOLLANDER/REUTERS

*Continued from page 15* the outgoing Knesset.) In March, Deri was convicted on a string of bribery and corruption charges. His sentence is pending, but most commentators say that—whether or not he is sent to prison—Shas' strength will increase on May 17. Shas has portrayed effectively—for its constituency, anyway—the conviction as an Ashkenazi plot, with Deri portraying himself as a latter-day Dreyfuss.

For the center-left, a major ray of hope appeared at the end of the '80s in the massive, unrestricted Jewish immigration from the former Soviet Union. To date, more than 800,000 ex-Soviet Jews have arrived in Israel. A large minority of this immigrant wave hailed not from Europeanized Moscow, St. Petersburg or the Ukraine but from places such as Chechnya and Georgia, whose Jewish populations were largely Sephardi. Many of them voted against Shamir in 1992, but these immigrants ultimately proved to be a hollow reed for Labor. By 1996, the pangs of absorption into Israeli society, distrust of government and knee-jerk hatred for anything "pink" or "red"

(tags placed on Labor and its ally to the left, the Meretz Party) among the "Russians" translated into massive support for Netanyahu. Judging by recent opinion polls, the immigrants continue to back Netanyahu and his hardline, anti-Arab policies.

Netanyahu's traditional blocs of support—the ultra-orthodox, orthodox and the less-educated, poorer Sephardi masses—have not, it appears, been put out by his succession of lapses and failures in internal and foreign affairs nor by his obvious untrustworthiness. Netanyahu's foot-dragging during the past three years regarding the Palestinians and his non-implementation of last October's American-brokered Wye Plantation agreement (stipulating further withdrawals in the West Bank) have done nothing to diminish his popularity among Sephardi voters (even though many of them appear more open to compromise with the Arabs than either Netanyahu or his coalition partners to the right). Nor have the defections from Likud of such stalwarts as former Science Minister Benny Begin (Menachem's son) and former Finance Minister Dan Meridor dented the enthusiasm among the party faithful.

fear and ideology" that gave him the slim margin of victory over Peres three years ago.

That puts Arafat in a bind. "Israel will react in the toughest possible way in the event of a unilateral declaration of a Palestinian state with Jerusalem as its capital," Netanyahu said recently. He even has threatened to annex those parts of the West Bank and Gaza Strip that remain under Israeli control if a state is declared. But foregoing a declaration leaves Arafat with little to show his people after years of semi-autonomy subject to Israeli whims.

Arafat is looking for an option that will be supported by the United States and other allies, including a possible postponement of the declaration. Drumming up Arab support hasn't been difficult, since many Arab leaders are disgusted with recent Israeli government policy. "The entire Arab world, without exception, will back any decision the Palestinians make regarding their state," Palestinian chief negotiator Saeb Erekat boasted recently. Indeed, both Jordan and Egypt have announced their support for a declaration of independence on May 4.

The U.S. State Department has been a tougher sell. U.S. officials are keenly aware that any strong statement against the Netanyahu government could backfire, angering Israeli voters. When Arafat visited Washington on March 23, seeking U.S. assurances of support, he was gently rebuffed and told there wouldn't be a change in U.S. policy. While the European Union has taken a similar tack with Arafat, warning him against the consequences of unilateral declarations, it recently turned up the heat on Netanyahu. When the Israeli government warned EU officials that any diplomatic meetings with Palestinians must take place outside Jerusalem, the EU issued a sharp reply, reiterating its poli-

cy that the city remains a separate entity outside Israeli control. Predictably, Netanyahu used the opportunity to raise the unpopular specter of a Jerusalem divided between Palestinians and Israelis.

While frustrated by their limited options, in truth, Palestinian leaders are reaping the rewards of patience and political moderation. Through diplomacy, Palestinians have continued to insist upon the right to statehood, even though the Oslo Accords never mentioned that possibility. Less than 10 years after Israel refused to officially recognize the Palestinian Liberation Organization, Ariel Sharon, a leading Israeli hawk and settlement advocate, publicly has acknowledged that a Palestinian state is inevitable. If Netanyahu loses this election, it will be because the hard-liners in his coalition accuse him of being deceitful. But the Israeli center increasingly supports a Palestinian state.

"The Oslo negotiating process underway is unfair, slow, and skewed in Israel's favor," Palestinian-Jordanian journalist Rami Khouri recently wrote in his syndicated column. "But it remains the only process that has achieved some meaningful national gains for both Palestinians and Israelis." While many Palestinians still rail against its inequities, the Palestinian leadership is tied to this peace process. For that reason, they will tread lightly on the political tightrope, likely postponing a statehood declaration and diffusing what Arafat has called "live ammunition against the Labor Party." Labor set the Oslo Accords in motion in the first place, and its return to power would offer the Palestinians a better bid for peace. ■

*Charmaine Seitz writes regularly on the Middle East.*

Indeed, demographics now favor Netanyahu even more strongly than in 1996 (when Netanyahu led Peres by 11 percent among Jewish voters, which was almost offset by the massive bloc for Peres among Israel's 1 million strong Arab minority). But a wild card has entered the race: Yitzhak Mordechai, a retired army general and popular former defense minister under Netanyahu. He leads the new Center Party, which he helped to form in March, along with Meridor and former army chief of staff Amnon Lipkin-Shahak. Mordechai, a Sephardi born in Iraqi Kurdistan, can be expected to siphon off enough Sephardi votes to put Netanyahu's victory in doubt.

Polls show that Mordechai probably would beat Netanyahu in a head-to-head contest. The problem is that Mordechai will likely finish third in the first round of elections behind Labor Party leader Ehud Barak (another former army chief of staff), who may well be beaten by Netanyahu in the June 1 run-off. Making matters worse, Likud and its right-wing and religious allies are almost certain to win a majority of the Knesset's 120 seats. Even in the event that Barak or Mordechai top Netanyahu, it's a mystery how either of them could put together a viable coalition government capable of carrying out center-left policies.

It is also possible that the elections will force new elections or, as in 1984, compel the politicians into another Labor-Likud unity government. But such a coalition would struggle

to move forward on foreign policy and defense issues. The last unity government proved incapable of advancing at all toward peace with the Palestinians. Though, under Peres' stewardship, it did manage to extricate the army from most of southern Lebanon.

Of course, given the unpredictable nature of the Middle East, the upcoming elections are impossible to call. The volatile region could deal out any number of unexpected jokers during the coming weeks. A wave of terrorist bombings, which many believe clinched Peres' defeat in 1996, might well affect voting patterns. Similarly, an upsurge of successful attacks by the fundamentalist Hezbollah guerrillas in southern Lebanon could sway support in various directions (though Arab violence against Israel tends to help the right). The actions and statements of Egypt, Syria, Iraq, Jordan or the United States may play a role. And perhaps most importantly will be how Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat handles the May 4 expiration of the Oslo accords (see above).

At the moment, it seems likely that Netanyahu and the right will win in June. Their victory—which would probably lead to a definitive suspension or end to the peace process and renewed Israeli-Palestinian violence—will have dire consequences for Israeli society and the entire Middle East. ■

*Benny Morris teaches history at Ben-Gurion University.*





# Young Man in a Scurry

By Doug Ireland

**I**n *The Sorrows of Young Werther*, Goethe observed that each step one takes tramples the life out of a thousand poor little worms. George Stephanopoulos, in *All Too Human*, tries to convince us that, in the years when his lust for power was at full throttle and he shilled for Bill Clinton's lurches to the right, he was really thinking about the worms all the time.

All political memoirs are self-serving, and this one is no exception. When the ambitious young son of a Greek Orthodox priest turned down a slot with the Peace Corps teaching English in Tunisia to start his adroit scramble up the greasy pole of Washington politics, he did so because he "wanted to do good and do well." This was a typical formulation in the "me" generation that came to manhood in the Reagan '80s; the contradictions inherent in such a goal seem to have escaped him at the time.

With hindsight, George now writes that in politics "the danger is when you stop caring about the difference between being right and being

Indeed, the most vivid and seemingly heartfelt writing in *All Too Human* concerns those internecine wars. Stephanopoulos traces the beginning of his end to the publication of Bob Woodward's 1994 book, *The Agenda*, to which he devotes nearly an entire chapter. George, then Clinton's communications director, had pushed hard inside the administration for cooperation with Woodward, for whom he was a major source—in the hope of sweetening the book's portrayal of how the White House made economic policy. But the strategy backfired. The authoritative detail Woodward gleaned from George and the other Clintonites made for a damning dissection of a president with no core beliefs, a rudderless and reactive White House under the president's wealthy childhood playmate and chief of staff, Mack McLarty—and how the 1992 campaign's neopopulist slogan, Putting People First, was traduced by a governance Putting the Bond Market First. Hillary Clinton denounced George as a disloyal leaker, the president turned frosty, and the resulting "professional insecurity and personal estrangement from the Clintons that followed from the Woodward book all contributed to my dark mood."

"But it was more than that," Stephanopoulos adds. "The power and celebrity I craved were also exacting their price. Certain that every move I made would be reported and every word I said would be repeated, I rarely let my guard down. ... Increasingly, my therapist's office felt like the only place I could store my frustration and sort out my feelings without any fear of disclosure."

Stephanopoulos already had been humiliated when he was replaced as communications director by Republican Reaganite David Gergen, but there was worse to come. After the electoral disaster of 1994, when the GOP took control of Congress (a defeat Hillary blamed on the Woodward book!), Clinton "withdrew from those of us on staff" and secretly turned to Dick Morris. The architect of Clinton's political comeback in Arkansas after losing the governorship, Morris had gone on to become a Republican hired gun for the likes of Jesse Helms and Trent Lott. Hillary, who had maintained the Clintons' ties to



WHITE HOUSE PHOTO

**Life is hard for poor George.**

Morris even after he had turned his coat, was the midwife for his return.

The first inkling George had that something was afoot came when Clinton began coming up with full-blown revisions of his stump speeches after presidential secretary Betty Currie left yellow post-it notes by Clinton's phone saying that "Charlie" had called:

Charlie was Dick's code name. The president had engaged him to run a covert operation against his own White House—a commander's coup against the colonels. The two of them plotted in secret—at night, on the phone, by fax. From December 1994 through August 1996 Leon Panetta managed the official White House staff, the Joint Chiefs commanded the military, the cabinet administered the government,

## All Too Human: A Political Education

By George Stephanopoulos  
Little, Brown  
456 pages, \$27.95

employed, or fail to notice that you don't know what the difference is anymore." Working for Clinton, the contradictions between the Good George and the Bad George drove Stephanopoulos into depression, therapy and Zoltax—but one comes away from this book with the distinct impression that it was not principle but the loss of power struggles inside the Clinton court that finally pushed him to resign shortly after the president's re-election.

but no single person more influenced the president of the United States than Dick Morris. As Dick's power grew, mine receded. ... I was a presidential strategist in name only.

When George and the Clintons were in the White House residence one day reviewing a draft of the 1995 State of the Union speech, and George questioned the excision of a line opposing "Republican tax cuts for the wealthy," Hillary snarled to Bill that he should "say what you want to say." George adds, "I didn't know then that the edit had come from Dick, who was hiding in the family room next door."

After Morris' role leaked, Clinton asked the two men to "work together," and eventually Dick and George established an *entente cordiale*. "Sometimes I felt guilty for enjoying [Dick's] company—for letting my need to be a player, and the pleasure I took from it, cloud my conviction that even being associated with a guy like Morris was corrupt," George says now.

When an incautious Morris bragged that he'd been behind the infamous "white hands" ad attacking affirmative action that had secured Jesse Helms' reelection, George argued to Leon Panetta and Erskine Bowles that Morris should be fired: "We dump Lani Guinier because of her views on race, but this guy writes the most racist ad in modern politics, and we say, 'What's the big deal?'" But the dump-Morris effort was stillborn when Stephanopoulos found out that Clinton had known all along about the ad—but "he just didn't care." Even after Clinton signed the welfare abolition bill that threw poor children into the street, George soldiered on: "I don't want to resign. Not before we win again."

Only the tabloid revelations about the toe-sucking triangulator's trysts with a prostitute—whom he allowed to listen in on his phone conversations with the president—brought Morris down. But his legacy is alive and well in the White House. As Stephanopoulos writes, "Clinton's shamelessness is the key to his political success." Or, as Morris himself once responded to a Larry King question about who the real Dick Morris was: "Bill Clinton is the real Dick Morris."

Whatever interest or force this book has lies essentially in its anecdotes. The writing, while smooth, is entirely pedestrian, rarely expanding

on the basic TV vocabulary of 3,000 words. When reaching for a simile, Stephanopoulos' imagination is confined to pop culture references from movies or TV. Thus, Vince Foster—the legal fixer for rapacious corporate giants like Stephens Inc. who became White House counsel—reminded George of "Gregory Peck as Atticus Finch in *To Kill a Mockingbird*," the radical journalist I.F. Stone "looked like Yoda come to life in a fraying flannel suit," UPI's Helen Thomas had a voice "like the Wicked Witch of the West" and so on. This is an annoying tic.

Also larded throughout this book are italicized commentaries on the conversations George is relating that are supposed to tell us what he was *really* thinking at the time. Now, George appears to have made extensive contemporaneous notes on his working days, but he quotes from them only sparingly and they reveal none of his doubts. This could lead the churlish to suspect that these italicized musings were peppered in during the editing process of this long-delayed book at the suggestion of his acknowledged "writing coach" (some would say ghostwriter) William Novak, or his Little, Brown editor, Bill Phillips, whom George acknowledges as "a good

director." The French would characterize afterthoughts like these as *l'esprit de l'escalier*, the bon mots one has as one is leaving by the stairs or, in Stephanopoulos' case, being kicked down them.

These italicized droppings from Icarus—to whom Stephanopoulos compares himself—are meant to reflect the mental jousting between the Good George and the Bad George that helped drive both of them to the therapist. Often though, they just sound whiny. Or they highlight the self-justifications that George continues to make for defending beak-and-nail policies that he claims violated his most deeply held principles. Other, stauncher liberals like Peter Edelman resigned in public protest when Clinton betrayed them and the most powerless of his constituencies. George simply slinked away to his book deal, his cushy and lucrative academic sinecure at Columbia, his ABC gig and his speaking fees—which have made him millions. He may not be doing any good, but he's doing well.

And any regrets he feels are small comfort to all the poor little worms. ■

Doug Ireland, former media critic for *The Village Voice*, has written extensively about the Clinton administration.

## Bland Ambition

By Marc Herman

Never send a television reporter to do a historian's job. In *Presidential Ambition: How the Presidents Gained Power, Kept Power, and Got Things Done*, former CBS news hand Richard Shenkman has transformed a

author of the tellingly titled *One-Night Stands with American History*, as well as *Legends, Lies & Cherished Myths of American History*, proposes that each president since George Washington (though not including the good general)

had to act in an increasingly more conniving fashion than his predecessor to get things done. Shenkman wants to map this arc, from national innocence to Nixon—and presum-

ably onward to the likes of Bill Clinton—by exposing the hidden machinations of past presidents.

"Because our knowledge of past presidents is thin—thin in comparison with our knowledge of presidents today—we



**Presidential Ambition: How the Presidents Gained Power, Kept Power, and Got Things Done**

By Richard Shenkman  
Harper Collins  
361 pages, \$26

theme of great promise into an unimaginative, crippling obvious work. He produces few new facts, and what conclusions he offers ring with a profound, apparently unintended cynicism.

It's a great idea, though. Shenkman,



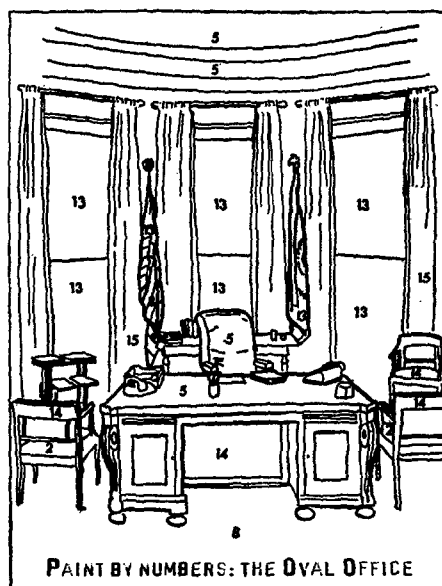
have fallen for the myth that presidents today are somehow morally inferior to presidents in the past, which in turn has bred a discouraging disillusionment," he writes. Cue complaints over Clinton "disgracing the office," or to Archie and Edith Bunker singing at the piano for "a man like Herbert Hoover again." But Shenkman is not pining for a hero. He is doing something far more pernicious. Though the book appears designed to contextualize modern corruption, no small goal, it also seems fairly comfortable with it, positioning it as the inevitable result of a president's innate ambition. "We like to pretend that normal people should be elected president," he concludes. "People, that is, with a normal amount of ambition. But normal people don't have what it takes—that extraordinary drive to succeed."

That's a reductive notion which reads like ad copy for *Forbes*—the magazine or the candidate—and worse, confuses ambition with dishonesty. It is also suspiciously simple. Shenkman doesn't suggest that the structure of American politics presents an institutional need to lie, or alternately, that politically ambitious people may be, in addition to confident, morally weak in some peculiar and interesting way. Instead, he says only that ambitious people seek the presidency, and often do so dishonestly. That's it, the whole book. Unfortunately, we already knew that. A while ago. With certainty.

**T**hat Shenkman lacks the ambition of his subjects, however, would not necessarily mean a bad book. Corruption is intriguing on its face, and even a retelling of little-known, minor stories would be useful, if not terribly inspiring. But Shenkman fails even this modest task he's set for himself. A key problem is the writing itself. Shenkman is an uninspiring author, lifeless with language and prone to melodramatic devices. His fondness for short, intoned concluding paragraphs ("It was an awesome power. It was inevitable that it would be abused.") proves distracting throughout. His choice of details ranges from the irrelevant to the uninformative.

"Events had gotten beyond [President James] Buchanan's control. So in the end had his young niece Harriet," he writes, explaining Buchanan's inability to cow a headstrong relative. It's a typically lazy

detail: Shenkman wants to use the niece as a way of getting at Buchanan's political weakness—even young relatives won't listen to him. But he tells the story in a paragraph, out of nowhere, then drops the discussion of Buchanan's life in the White House. On he moves, instead, to more presidents, explained in similar hodge-podges of thin, uninformative anecdote. In his stories, Shenkman often seems to mistake crumbs left by previous visitors as undiscovered nuggets waiting to be revealed.



Similarly his research, presumably a strong suit for a former reporter, appears to have amounted to reading other presidential histories and synopsisizing them. The political stories he comes away with are vague, and do not seem to deviate much from the popular mythology of the presidents being discussed. "Many people on the frontier lived with hardship as Lincoln had, and took pride in surviving. Lincoln did not," he writes of the twelfth president. "In his frontier roots he felt not pride but shame." As we all know, Honest Abe got out his shovel covered in coal dust and began to better himself, and a few years later suspended *habeas corpus*, badda-bing.

But this is not history, and nor is it political analysis. It amounts to a maudlin, and notably unattributed, retelling of a story Shenkman appears to have read in a more carefully assembled book. (The appendix for the chapter cites three general biographies, eight political biographies and Arthur Schlesinger Jr.'s 1974 work, *The*

*Imperial Presidency*, as sources, though it's unclear what parts of those books he used, and where they apply. Other chapters are clearly footnoted, however.)

*Presidential Ambition* lurches on this way for more than 300 pages, an unpleasant slog, organized chronologically from the 1700s and ending with Richard Nixon. Even by then, Shenkman's chosen endpoint feels cursory and incomplete. Why a book on the history of presidential ambition could not have included more recent information, up to and including President Clinton, is unclear.

This is an immense oversight. By the end, Clinton, an ego with a man attached, seems the apotheosis of the book's thesis, more than any of the presidents Shenkman does tackle. But Shenkman completely ignores the current president, as well as the four presidents before him and, indeed, all of American politics since Watergate. Understandably, Shenkman wants to ration his attention for what he considers the obscure parts of early American history, and away from well-known, recent events. But dwelling on causes of excess ambition begs a consideration, however minor, of the modern effects. This lack of apparent relevance, or worse, the assumption of relevance, muddies the book's focus and makes it end like a textbook, a bland chronology of events in search of, but failing to find, a continuing narrative.

It is not easy to dismiss a work that doubtless took years to produce, but there is nothing in *Presidential Ambition* to recommend. Shenkman is obviously onto a timely topic, and he clearly loves the history he is telling. But *Presidential Ambition* is an unnecessary, unenlightening work. For portraits of ambition run amok, better to read something from Shenkman's appendix in the back. Or perhaps George Stephanopoulos' evil little book. Or wait for Clinton's, any Clinton's.

That's not to suggest ignoring presidential history. But compared to what Shenkman describes, the current administration seems sure to remain history in the making. ■

**Marc Herman** covered the 1996 presidential election for *Might* magazine. His writing also has appeared in *Civilization*, *Mother Jones* and *Spin*.

# Bull Market

By Bill Boisvert

In the '80s, investment bankers were the stock villains of popular culture. In movies and news reports alike, they tempted lads from the heartland into a whirlwind of cocaine and super-models and insider trading that left shuttered factories and bankrupt savings and loans in its wake. But in the '90s,

charming and personable wife."

Winkelman is by no means a standout at Goldman Sachs, where brilliance, charisma and simplicity of spirit seem to be the norm. One senior partner "is a man of extraordinary creativity and vision," Endlich writes; another "exudes such warmth and sincerity that he is impossible not to like." Most Christ-like of all is former co-chairman (and current Treasury Secretary) Robert Rubin, who, at the close of every meeting, "would turn around and with a quiet smile raise his index and middle finger in a V and say, 'Peace.'"

stability and growth ahead of short-term profits. Meanwhile, the possibility of someday making partner inspires junior staff to feats of hard work and hustle. At all levels, says Endlich, workers and executives alike exhibit a musketeer-like solidarity with the firm's collective interests.

This is the "culture of success" that distinguishes Goldman Sachs from its rivals. The culture remained tacit for many years, but in the '80s management had it codified into a list of "principles" like "Our client's interests always come first," "We stress teamwork in everything we do" and "Our profits are the key to our success." These are recited at meetings "with all the solemnity of the pledge of allegiance." Cultural transmission is deemed so important that it is sometimes taken to the point of hazing: One partner would call up subordinates at 3 a.m. to ask them what Goldman Sachs "stood for," not hanging up until the tired underling mumbled "client service, integrity and teamwork." The litany was later updated to include "strategic dynamism" and "commitment to change."

Endlich ascribes talismanic powers to "the culture," crediting it as the source of the firm's pristine reputation, gargantuan market share and stupefying profits. But the skeptical reader will find it hard to share her awe. The Goldman Sachs "principles" she reveres are nothing more than the typical grab bag of buzzwords and platitudes you would find in any corporate mission statement—simultaneously high-minded and crass, and far too vague to serve as a guide to action.

Moreover, Endlich's faith in them is mocked at every turn by the actual deeds by which the Goldman Sachs culture manifests itself to the world. Endlich is exhaustive in rehashing the details of these misadventures; which include a gigantic Ponzi scheme that the firm set up in the '20s, bankrupting thousands of investors, and, more recently, a whole string of baroque stock transactions through which the firm helped British media mogul Robert Maxwell loot his companies' pension funds. In the hands of a



**Goldman Sachs: The Culture of Success**  
By Lisa Endlich  
Alfred A. Knopf  
319 pages, \$27.50

financiers are populist heroes, the very antitheses of the lurid, wheeler-dealers of the '80s. Grandfatherly types, filmed in grainy black and white, they struggle to stem the tide of mass-market anomie by "measuring success one investor at a time"; they are the guardians of the old and the infirm, not the looters of their pension funds.

To explain this turnaround, we could invoke a number of causes, such as the stock market run-up, the arrival of the Internet start-up to take up the burden of embodying capitalism's id, or the unrelenting pro-speculator propaganda from the likes of the Beardstown Ladies. Or we could turn to *Goldman Sachs: The Culture of Success*, Lisa Endlich's history of the world's premier investment bank, and learn that investment bankers simply are the paragons of integrity they are made out to be.

To pick one at random, take Goldman Sachs partner Mark Winkelman, "a wise man and a skilled manager" and "a tough but fair boss" who "demanded no more of his employees than he did of himself." Despite being a "visionary and instrument of change," he is "entirely without pretense," even going so far as to ride the subway to work with lesser mortals, and moreover is "a devoted family man with a down to earth,

Passages like these have led critics to accuse Endlich, who was once a Goldman Sachs vice president herself, of writing a hagiography. But to be fair, she recognizes that the uniform saintliness of her subjects requires a systematic explanation, which she grounds in the fact that Goldman Sachs is a partnership, the last of its kind on Wall Street. Unlike a publicly held corporation, which is owned by thousands of absentee stockholders, Goldman Sachs is owned by a few hundred partners—employees who work



The firm's management committee in the '80s. Robert Rubin, third from right, later would become co-chairman—then Clinton's Treasury Secretary.

their way up through the ranks and are granted a share of the firm's capital by more senior partners as a reward for their ability and devotion.

According to Endlich, the incentives built into the partnership structure have a miraculous socializing effect on Goldman Sachs employees. Because the partners have devoted their entire careers to the firm, they put long-term

VIC DELUCANE/NEW YORK TIMES



more critical writer this material would serve as an object lesson for privatizers and deregulators and all others who would rely on the kindness of bankers. But Endlich always concludes that the firm itself was the real victim—of swindlers like Maxwell, of biased juries and SEC investigators, or of its own rogue operatives, who never really “fit in” at Goldman Sachs anyway. And in each case, “the culture” emerges all the stronger from its ordeal.

In a final irony that seems all but lost on the author, *The Culture of Success* climaxes with Goldman Sachs’ repudiation of that very culture when, after 12 years of internal wrangling, the partners last year voted to abolish the partnership and sell the firm as a public corporation. (The firm just now has filed its registration papers with the SEC; the public offering will probably take place in a few months.) Many would find the drama of bankers giving up their million-dollar partnerships for million-dollar managing directorships less than moving, but Endlich paints the controversy over the sale as an anguished *Kulturkampf*—partners appar-

ently “screamed and cried”—pitting partnership fraternity and self-management against corporate alienation and hierarchy. But the partners ultimately

**One partner would call up subordinates at 3 a.m. to ask them what Goldman Sachs “stood for,” not hanging up until the tired underling mumbled “client service, integrity and teamwork.”**

took a more prosaic view; the deciding factor seems to have been the bull market, which convinced them that they could sell the firm for four times its current value through a stock offering.

Endlich’s dull book does have a redeeming facet, in that by sifting through the minutiae of corporate ownership structures presented here, one

can piece together an important critique of the market idolatry that investment banks so furiously hype. The stock market is useful, the theory goes, because it provides the economy with investment capital. Investment banks like Goldman Sachs serve as midwives to this process: The bank buys stock from companies and sells it to investors, thus channeling money from investors to companies, where it can be put to good use building factories and dreaming up technology. But as Doug Henwood points out in his estimable book *Wall Street*, this theory is a myth. Most investment capital comes from companies’ internal profits; in fact, the stock market in the ’90s has been a net *drain* on investment capital, with corporations as a whole buying back more stock than they have issued. The New Economy, like the old one, is built not on the “savvy” of investors but on the profitability of labor.

Then what is the stock market for? As the Goldman Sachs saga demonstrates, it’s there to commoditize risk, not investment. Goldman Sachs didn’t decide to sell its stock to raise capital; it is already sitting on a mountain of it. The real issues are “liability” (the partners could lose their shirts if the firm suffers a big loss) and “volatility” (the firm could be crippled if enough of the partners quit and walk off with their capital). In other words, it’s just too risky to have all your money tied up in an iffy venture like a banking partnership. Much better to sell off the stock, pocket the cash and let the mutual funds worry about risk. Writ large, that’s the stock market: Companies issue stock so that their rich ex-owners can sleep a little easier at night.

Endlich mourns the passing of Goldman Sachs’ “culture of success,” but her lament is premature. The Goldman Sachs culture, after all, is just the culture of stock speculation, the culture of rentiers and do-nothings; the horrible culture of crotchiness that insists that 20-year-olds think of nothing but their retirement plans. That culture, sadly, is alive and well. ■

Bill Boisvert wrote about the motivational seminar industry in the Dec. 13, 1998 issue.



*Roofscape, 1992, from Revolution of Forms: Cuba's Forgotten Art Schools* by John A. Loomis (Princeton Architectural Press). Cuba's National Art Schools, commissioned in 1961 by Fidel Castro and Che Guevara, are striking architectural examples of the Revolution's early idealistic promise—and its later Sovietized ossification. The sensuous buildings were disavowed as bourgeois in 1965, and abandoned to the jungle. Interest in the schools has revived in recent years, though, and efforts to rehabilitate them are underway.

# Hobohemia Revisited

By Ted Kleine

In the world of homeless men, the hobo was an aristocrat. Unlike the bindle-stiffs who roamed the countryside begging for table scraps or the layabouts who sat around the Bowery drinking, the hobo worked. He traveled. He had prestige.

"A hobo is one who travels in search of work, the migratory worker who must go about to find employment," wrote

University of Chicago sociology student named Nels Anderson found the hobos in 1920.

As a child in the 1890s, a time he called the "Hobomania Era," Anderson followed his Swedish immigrant father from job to job. He spent the first few years of his own working life roaming the west as a mule skinner and ranch hand. By the time he made it to Chicago, at 31, "I knew the hobo, his work, and his urban habitat, and I was permitted in two classes to do papers about that world little known to most professors."

The book he eventually produced, *The Hobo*, has been newly reissued, along with some of his writings on migrant farmworkers, in a volume titled *On Hobos and Homelessness*.

To study the hobos, Anderson settled into a rented room near Skid Row and started hanging out, picking up details of hobo life. There were between 30,000 and 75,000 men living in Hobohemia, depending on how hard the times were, and their main drag was West Madison Street, a hectic strip of cheap hotels, taverns, missions, fortune tellers and back-room gambling joints. The hobos slept jammed together on the floors of flophouses, or, if they were flush, in a "cage," a six-by-eight foot room with wire mesh for a ceiling. The lunchrooms they ate in served pig's shank and cabbage for 15 cents, and rivaled the local stockyards for filth. For entertainment, they paid a dime to see a burlesque. The leg shows had "a strange attraction to the homeless and lonely men," Anderson wrote. (Today, these same needs—for cheap food and peeks at naked women—are met by McDonald's and XXX peep shows or Internet porn sites accessed at the public library. The difference is the food is less nutritious, and the women only photographs.)

West Madison was such a magnet for the homeless because it was the local "slave market" for cheap labor. Except for the "home guard"—worn-out old men tired of life on the road—most hobos wanted to find a job in a faraway city, to

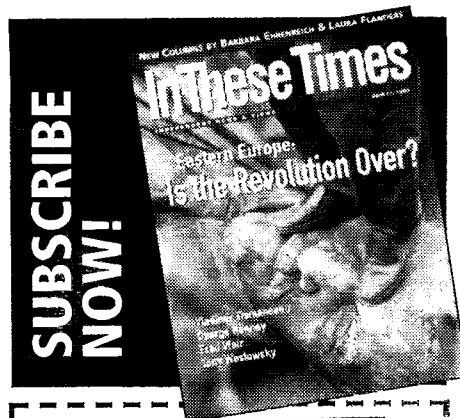


**On Hobos and Homelessness**  
By Nels Anderson  
University of Chicago Press  
301 pages, \$18

Nicholas Klein, one-time president of the Hobo College, a Chicago debating society/shouting match. "The name originated from the words 'hoe-boy,' plainly derived from work on the farm. A tramp is one who travels but does not work, and a bum is a man who stays in one place and does not work. Between these grades there is a great gulf of social distinction. Don't get hobos and tramps mixed."

The hobo's heyday was in the late 19th century, during the westward migration that followed the Civil War. Rootless workingmen trooped after the pioneer wagons, too late to claim any land of their own, but just in time to work for a dollar a day laying railroad tracks, mining copper, felling timber or picking apples. By the 1920s, though, America didn't need the hobos anymore. The last spikes had been driven into the transcontinental railroads, the mines and the lumber camps were unionized and the fruit ranchers were hiring Mexicans, who could be driven back across the border if they asked for a raise.

There were, however, still plenty of young men unfit for the home and hearth, wanderers who would have made restless husbands, bored assembly-line workers and bad credit risks. With the roads suddenly barren of work, this hobo class was forced to settle in the Skid Rows of the great cities. Their biggest colony was in Chicago, the town where all the railroads converged. It was called "The Main Stem" or "Hobohemia," and it was here that a



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move on before the novelty of Chicago turned into the grind of domesticity. "The men parade the streets and scan the signs chalked on the windows or smeared over colored posters," Anderson observed. "Eager to 'ship' somewhere, they are generally interested in a job as a means to reach a destination. The result is that distant jobs are in demand while good paying, local jobs usually go begging."

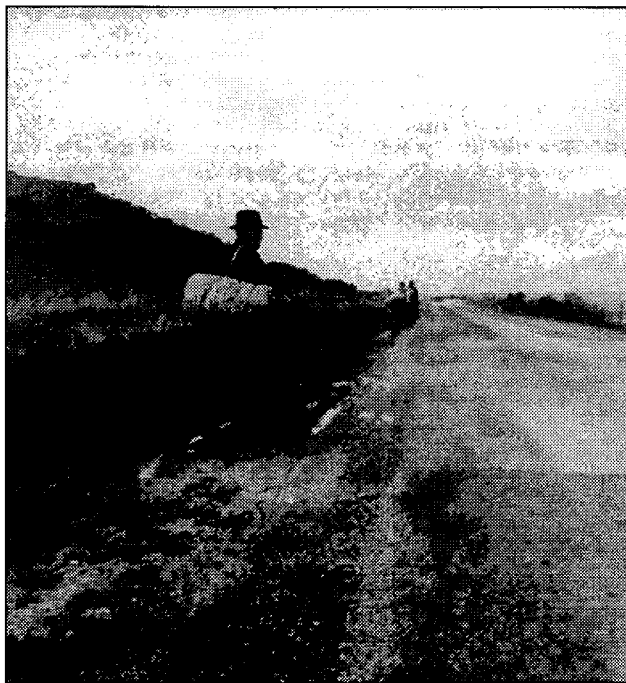
The hobos Anderson met were traveling not so much to get somewhere, but to escape from troubles for which there are no geographic cures. Perhaps to prove that he was a real sociologist, and not just a grad student slumming among the underclass, Anderson conducted a survey of 400 hobos, mainly in Utah and Idaho (he had to disguise his questions as friendly banter, after learning that most hobos shunned a man with a pencil and a stack of forms). Almost all were single, and nearly half gave "wanderlust" as a reason for their rootlessness. The next most popular responses: "home trouble," "drink" and "women."

A real hobo hits the road from time to time, so Anderson camped out with his subjects in the "jungles," so familiar to him from his days as an itinerant laborer. One night, he caught a flop in a camp near a rural rail junction, and saw an example of hobo justice. A punk was caught robbing a sleeping 'bo, and a kangaroo court sentenced him to fight his intended victim. After the punk got his licking, he was "'frisked," that is, ordered to donate all but one dollar to the jungle," then expelled. (In today's urban camps, homeless men can still be sticklers for law and order. They know that if they don't roust troublemakers themselves, the cops may clear out the whole colony.)

Even in Anderson's day, the hobo was romanticized as a vanishing American species, like the minstrel or the buffalo. There's a whole chapter here devoted to J.E. How, "The Millionaire Tramp," an eccentric St. Louis heir who chose to live his life on the bum. How slept in flophouses and wore old clothes, using his fortune instead to help found the "Hobo News" and the Hobo College, which evolved into the College of Complexes, a monthly lecture series still

held in Chicago. (After Anderson's book came out, he was dubbed a "Knight of the Road" by Supreme Knight Jeff Davis, King and Emperor of Hobos of America Inc. and another early exponent of the hobobilia industry.)

**N**owadays, many of the people who style themselves "hobos" are slummers like How, hopping the rails for kicks, not as a way to catch a ride from one job to the next. There's an annual hobo convention in Iowa, which boasts that it's attended by "doctors and



Unlike other homeless men, the hobo worked and traveled.

lawyers"—likely the same types who dress up in vintage uniforms for Civil War re-enactments.

But in the real world of the hobos, the camaraderie of the jungles has been replaced by paranoia and predation. In the last few years, railroad outlaws known as "yeggs" have committed ritual killings of boxcar riders, according to Buzz Potter, a contributor to *Hobo Times: America's Journal of Wanderlust*. "Today, my friend, there are serial murderers and casual murderers alike roaming the high iron and the problem seems to be getting worse," Potter writes. He then advises would-be hobos not to speak to or share a car with anyone they meet on the rails. "Don't ever, in these days, accept an offer to jungle up with one or more guys ... that custom died in the '50s and you could wake up with your gear missing, or worse."

Anderson used the terms "hobo" and

"homeless" almost interchangeably. He seemed to be referring less to a lifestyle, than to a type of man who could fit into either category, depending on the industrial conditions of his day. In Anderson's list of reasons men become homeless, only one—"unemployment and seasonal work"—is economic. Others are "crises in the life of the person," "defects of personality" and the classic "wanderlust." Every generation, he seems to be saying, has its share of hard-luck types with no talent for stability.

Lately, "pro-business" mayors have been trying to rid their cities of Skid Row types by confiscating their shopping carts, offering one-way bus tickets out of town or jailing homeless men for loitering in parks or public lots. But 80 years ago, Anderson knew that the homeless would always be with us, so his solution was the cleanest, safest Hobohemia possible, a place with sanitary, city-run hotels and shelters, free medical care and vocational training. He also suggested that the federal government "devise a program for ... performing, during periods of public depression, such public works as road building, construction of public building, reforestation, irrigation, and drainage of swamps." Franklin D. Roosevelt later did just that when he founded the Works Progress Administration and the Civilian Conservation Corps,

two agencies that would be worth reviving. (Anderson however had little use for bums and tramps. He suggested that "beggars, vagrants and petty criminals" be re-educated at penal farms and prisons.)

"Some have proposed abolishing Hobohemia as a slum," Anderson wrote, "but the many roads that lead to such a place as Hobohemia would still have to terminate at a common point."

Or, as Robert Service, a poet quoted often by drifters and down-and-outers, put it:

There's a race of men who don't fit in  
A race that can't sit still  
So they break the hearts of kith and kin  
And they roam the world at will.

Ted Kleine wrote about today's homeless along Chicago's Lower Wacker Drive in the March 21 issue.

# On and Off Her Back

By Jane Goldman

In the prologue to her book, *Tales of the Lavender Menace*, Karla Jay explains why she wrote this memoir of life as a lesbian political activist: She's tired of being treated like an old lady. Particularly, kids assume she never had much sex. When Jay travels around the country talking about the women's and gay movements, somebody inevitably asks her, "Did feminists

feminist groups in New York: Redstockings, which was the intellectual, Marxist group; The Feminists, with leader Ti-Grace Atkinson, a refugee from the milder, bureaucratic National Organization for Women; and WITCH (Women's International Terrorist Conspiracy from Hell), which took a Yippie-like approach of staging attention-getting and often amusing public protests they called "zaps." Jay joined Redstockings, which promoted consciousness-raising groups as a way for women to understand their oppression as a class.

But Jay often found herself as devalued in those groups as she had been with the male student radicals. Lesbians were not particularly welcome in the women's movement; the founder of NOW, Betty Friedan, had complained that lesbians were a "lavender menace" diverting the movement's mission and tainting its members. Lesbian author Rita Mae Brown was one of the first to come out of the closet in a Redstockings group; Jay recounts how she felt she'd been hit by lightning when Brown stood

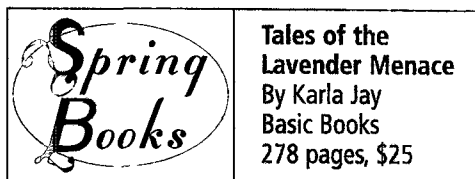
beliefs. She mostly had met women at a downtown lesbian bar, Kooky's, which she describes memorably: dirty glasses, watered-down drinks, a bathroom guard who handed out three sheets of toilet paper to each patron, strict butch/femme divisions and an owner who would sniff or sip a customer's drink to make sure she wasn't drinking water to avoid buying booze.

Then came the legendary riots in June 1969 after cops raided the Stonewall Inn, which Jay thinks have gotten a lot more attention than they deserved. She considers the event just another example of queers who "defended their turf in a bar ... because they had no place else to run to or hang out in." To her, this wasn't political activism. "There seemed to me to be a great difference between conscious political action that happened because members of a group or a community agreed on a common core of oppression and decided to overthrow it and the kind of spontaneous upheaval that had occurred at the Stonewall."

Jay's evaluation of Stonewall is probably her most controversial assertion, and I disagree with her. Stonewall itself may not have been that different from defensive actions that came before, but the media coverage, as well as the general reaction of the gay community and beyond, made it pivotal. Celebration of Stonewall is not a celebration of gays fighting back; it is a celebration of the moment when gay rights became important to more than a few, when the country (or at least New York City) was ready to acknowledge it as a legitimate issue.

Jay joined the Gay Liberation Front soon after Stonewall, and she cites Toby Marotta's 1981 book *The Politics of Homosexuality* for her description of the two major factions in the group. There were the "cultural reformers," who wanted a gay counterculture and gay visibility; and the "political activists," who opted for political demonstrations.

Both were after the same ends: recognition and political power. But the cul-



have sex? Camille Paglia says you didn't." She complains that "they never ask me whether we accomplished anything worthwhile," but the thing that really irks her is when they assume that gay men had all the fun. So she wrote this book, asserting her place in the history of the times.

In between the sexual exploits is a welcome chronicle of the early days of feminist and gay political action; a history of somebody left out of *Hair* or Woodstock or even Stonewall: the lesbian.

Jay was a freshman at Barnard in 1965 when Malcolm X spoke on campus, three days before he was assassinated. She participated in the 1968 campus protests over defense research on campus and Columbia's construction of a gym in a park used by the neighboring, mostly black community. She was sympathetic to the causes, but put off by the attitudes of the men she encountered, the "sexist student revolutionaries." She remembers: "I no longer wanted to work with straight white men, however well meaning they might be."

And so she went off to join the women's movement. In 1969, she writes, there were three well-known radical



A flyer for one of many queer dances Jay helped organize.

up and denounced the leadership for oppressing her the way men had been oppressing them.

Jay had been unable to find other lesbians who shared her radical political



tural reformers felt the right road was to increase cultural visibility—through gay newspapers, gay clubs and, most importantly, by having gays come out. As Jay describes the position, they then thought “if every gay and lesbian person in the United States could come out, our lives would be different because heterosexuals would have to recognize how very many of us there were and grant us our rights.” Naïve, she acknowledges, but she notes that we’re still far from that goal.

The political activists, as she describes them, “believed in disrupting the system through political demonstrations. ... [They believed] that power is never voluntarily relinquished and must be seized from the oppressor.” Jay leaned toward the cultural reformers. But both groups could agree to work together on gay dances. But then the men started treating the lesbians as if they were wives. What’s more, they didn’t want to spend money on women-only dances that weren’t as big a draw as the men’s events were. It was an old, familiar struggle. The women’s movement didn’t want the lesbians, and the gays didn’t want them either.

But the women’s movement soon saw some change. Jay calls what happened on May 1, 1970, “the single most important action organized by lesbians

who wanted the women’s movement to acknowledge our presence and needs.” It was the “Lavender Menace Zap.” The scene was the Second Congress to Unite Women, organized by NOW, which, Jay argues, was extremely homo-

### **Betty Friedan complained that lesbians were a “lavender menace” diverting the women’s movement and tainting feminists.**

phobic. Rita Mae Brown resigned from her job at NOW over the First Congress’ refusal to acknowledge the Daughters of Bilitis (an early lesbian group) as a sponsor. And Brown organized an action to protest lesbians’ exclusion from the Second Congress. The protesters ran down the aisles of the auditorium where a conference panel was being held, wearing homemade T-shirts that read, “Lavender Menace,” “Take a lesbian to lunch!” and “Superdyke loves you!” The planned event was completely disrupted, and the assembled women spent the

evening talking about heterosexism.

I don’t know whether Jay oversells the evening’s importance; gay male visibility and progress in gay rights in general also had a lot to do with lesbians losing their pariah status. And it’s not clear who influenced whom more, the feminist theorists or the lesbian activists—who both saw homophobia as symptoms of pathological patriarchy.

In the rest of the book, Jay goes on to recount her experiences with politics, sex and omnipresent drugs. There were gay-ins and orgies; organizations began to splinter into groups formed around evermore exclusive identities. Jay’s last anecdote is a good one about a consciousness-raising group that erupted into violence: “I didn’t become a feminist to get into a brawl with other women.” And so Jay took a break from activism and began to write, publishing *Out of the Closets: Voices of Gay Liberation* in 1972, and there ends her memoir. Since then, she has been engaged in “a different kind of political activism”—writing and public speaking. She is currently a tenured full professor of English and director of women’s studies at Pace University in New York.

Jay has led a wonderful life, worth recounting. My biggest disappointment with *Tales of the Lavender Menace*, however, is that it is rather unevocative of the times, short on emotional content or intellectual insight and long on cataloging people and events. But these are people and events that need to be recalled. Better than anyone I’ve read, Jay illuminates those *Alice in Wonderland* years when it seemed that women and gays were in the spotlight, yet lesbians remained as invisible as ever. Jay was there, and I’m delighted she’s chosen to tell us about it. It’s wonderful to read an account of sex, drugs and radical politics that is not only unapologetic, but proud. Those were amazing times and amazing people. Bless them all. ■

**Jane Goldman** lives in San Francisco, where she is editor-at-large of *The Industry Standard*.



From *Every Worker is an Organizer: Farm Labor and the Resurgence of the United Farm Workers*, photographs by David Bacon. On exhibit until May 28 at the AFL-CIO’s George Meany Memorial Archives in Silver Spring, Md.

# The Virgin Queen

By Lisa Miya-Jervis

**W**hen Wendy Shalit was a student at Williams College, she wrote an article for the school paper on the evils of co-ed bathrooms and residence halls. *Reader's Digest* picked up the story, alerting its young author that she had hit a rich vein of reactionary cultural discontent. *A Return to Modesty*, published earlier this year, mines this vein in an expansion of her college thesis (she was awarded her B.A. in philosophy in 1997), and has been alarmingly well-received by publications as diverse as the *Wall Street Journal*, *L.A. Weekly* and *Mirabella*.

Shalit is one of three peas in a pod with date rape denier Katie Roiphe and

back in time to a bygone era, bringing with it all manner of goodies for gender relations. It is the great equalizer: "Modesty is a reflex," she proclaims, "arising naturally to help a woman protect her hopes and guide their fulfillment—specifically, [the] hope for one man." It molds young women into some sort of perfect femininity, and conveniently upholds antiquated gender roles, showing men "how to relate as a man to a woman."

**H**er characterizations of gendered romantic expectations are boring and old hat, no more deserving of serious consideration than *The Rules*, that best-selling instruction manual for desperate straight women who can't abide the thought of remaining unmarried for one more minute. But Shalit's assertion that rape and sexual harassment would disappear under the magic wand of

modesty bears much more scrutiny. The social code this author yearns for dictates that women are fragile, easily embarrassed, invariably vulnerable creatures. A modest woman—to Shalit, a good, moral and above all natural woman—would never desire sex before marriage or wear slit skirts.

Shalit's basic thesis is that respect for this female modesty—a curious blend of exaggerated courtesy, protectionism and proscriptions on sexual behavior—is a silver bullet that will grant women "freedom to walk in the street without having to fear being harassed, stalked, or raped ... freedom to be alone with a man and still deserve respectful treatment."

The most obvious problem with Shalit's premise is her contention that modesty is a natural, essential female trait. (Her "proof"? Strippers refuse Howard Stern's persistent requests to disrobe on national television; women hold their skirts down on windy days; sometimes crude language is offensive; and young girls embarrass easily.) But this failing is not nearly the most serious.

At bottom, Shalit's prescriptions for modesty reveal that she would rather have male authority speaking for women than women speaking for them-

selves. "Ultimately, it seems that only men can teach other men how to behave around women," she argues. "Perhaps this is the reason sexual harassment legislation has been, in large part, a failure: it essentially involves women telling men how to behave."

She laments the lack of "rules ... to regulate gentlemen callers" that would stop a classmate from knocking on her door late at night and demanding entry. "In 1948," she notes approvingly in reference to a law preventing most women from working in bars, "women were not allowed in places where they might be treated poorly." This hole in her logic is typical: Why wouldn't her beloved modesty have stopped bar patrons from treating a waitress poorly? She never says.

Also typical is her ahistoricism. She writes as if there were no rape before the sexual revolution and all this immodest permissiveness—when, of course, it is the reporting of rape, not rape itself, that is a modern phenomenon. Privilege blinds her to the workings of class difference; not once does she note that the less money a woman's family had, the less she was entitled to the protections that modesty supposedly offered.

And this points to another fundamental problem. Shalit's respect for modesty is

**Wendy Shalit lives in a parallel universe where her own experience is infinitely generalizable and making sense is quaintly unnecessary.**

not respect for women themselves. It is respect for abstract principles of chastity and other virtues ascribed to women when men want to control them. "We can no longer talk of someone, say, *defiling a virgin*," she complains, not realizing that the concept of such defilement was not about the feelings of the virgin in question but the value of her body in its "pure" state. She even notes that, for Enlightenment philosopher David Hume, "the salient point [of modesty] was that it assured men the paternity of their children." There can be no clearer indication than this of modesty's uses in seeking to own and control the female body, but the notion does not occur to her.



**A Return to Modesty:  
Discovering the Lost Virtue**  
By Wendy Shalit  
The Free Press  
291 pages, \$24

professional bad girl Elizabeth Wurtzel—though all three authors would hate to hear it. Each, prematurely awarded a book contract for what should have been a 10,000-word essay, lives in a parallel universe where her own experience is infinitely generalizable and logic is quaintly unnecessary—because, after all, when your own values are the only possible right ones, there is no need to make sense. As Roiphe herself wrote in *Harper's Bazaar* about Shalit's screed (clearly blind to the irony of describing her own work as well), "She writes with the certainty and the grandiosity of the very young. There is no sense of moderation, of the vast area that lies between the extremes, the area in which most people actually live their lives."

In Shalit's world of extremes, violence is caused by rudeness and gender roles are as natural and inevitable—and as pleasing—as the sun rising each morning. Women are vulnerable creatures, wanting more than anything else a man who will settle down and marry them so they can live happily ever after. Men, when left to their own devices, are simply "uncivilized males who [run] after as many sexual partners as they can get." But modesty is a spell that, when cast, will take our society



She is at least partially right, though, in her diagnosis of social ills. We do live in an oversexualized culture; young women (but also, she neglects to consider, young men) often lack peer-group support for any sexual choices outside cultural norms. But what Shalit misses is that social punishment is meted out not only for abstinence, but also for homosexuality and, for girls, going "too far." (If she believes that "slut" is no longer a common high school insult she is sorely mistaken.)

Furthermore, there is significantly more support for abstinence than she thinks there is. She is either conveniently ignorant of, or purposely overlooking, religious youth movements such as True Love Waits (which can indeed provide much-needed support for some) and the many school districts nationwide with abstinence-only sex-ed curricula (which only serve to deny much-needed information to all).

What we need, though, is not more modesty about the length of our skirts and the levels of our sexual activity, but less modesty about speaking out. If our oversexualized culture allows women little choice but to have sex, if we are browbeaten into promiscuity by women's magazines and peer pressure, then women do not need some external code to rescue us. We need instead to raise our own voices. Shalit's myopia is caused by her assumption that feminism has been completely successful, that "we have wiped our society clean of all traces of patriarchal rules and codes of conduct"—as if campus Women's Pride Week and co-ed dorms were rock-solid evidence of gender inequality's disappearance.

It is not feminism's supposed destruction of patriarchy that has gotten us into this mess that Shalit calls immodesty. The truth is rather that feminism's battles have only been partially won. We have knocked down some old rules that (despite Shalit's denial and *reductio ad absurdum* arguments) yes, really were oppressive—but we're only halfway to replacing them with something better. We still lack a respect for the female voice, whether it is saying "yes" or "no" or, as Shalit should have simply told her late-night would-be visitor, "Go away, I'm not going to let you in." ■

**Lisa Miya-Jervis** is the editor of the quarterly magazine *Bitch: Feminist Response to Pop Culture*.

# Weird Science

By Lark Park

In the spirit of Proust's *Remembrance of Things Past*, Madeleine L'Engle's *A Swiftly Tilting Planet* and Ella Leffland's *Rumors of Peace*, Jenny Offill's first novel, *Last Things*, takes us back to the lyrical state of innocence, mystery and fabrication that is at the heart of childhood. *Last Things* is not a complex narrative web like Proust's memoir, nor is it a pure fantasy like L'Engle's stories. Nevertheless, the significance of childhood experience and the hazy line between reality and desire weigh heavily in this poetic coming-of-age story.

Alternately precocious and tormenting, 8-year-old Grace Davitt, the narrator of *Last Things*, is the picture of ebbing childhood—observant, but not yet judgmental of her surroundings: her

makes her a thrilling playmate for Grace. The two take night swims, play tricks on Grace's father, Jonathan, and share a secret language called Annic, which reverses the first 13 letters of the alphabet with the last 13. With her mother, the ordinary becomes extraordinary.

In comparison, Jonathan Davitt, a science teacher, seems dull and unimaginative, a constrained spirit with no "obvious manifesto"—as Edgar, the boy-genius/babysitter, puts it. At a loss for conversation during a weekend alone with his daughter, Jonathan reads her an entire book on the evolution of squirrels. He tells Grace such things as the moon is just a "piece of rock in the sky, beautiful but dead." His marriage proposal to Anna consists of telling her, "You're the only woman I've ever met who never bores me."

Despite his love for the free-spirited Anna, Jonathan himself is a purely rigid and literal man. His favorite book is *Know Your Constitution!* which he carries at all times to defend himself against any religious intrusions in school. He corrects his smarmy twin brother, who plays "Mr. Science," host of a popular show for kids, on a point about the life of ants. He gets himself fired for telling a Catholic student that God is really a monkey, a point that underscores his inability to relate to the non-scientific world of faith and emotion.

Sadly, Grace's world, though rich with her mother's inventions, is devoid of friends. There's only Edgar, who has a crush on Grace's mother, grows luminous mold and prefers nothingness to being; her cousin Alec, sometime playmate and tormentor; and of course *The Encyclopedia of the Unexplained*, the seminal text of Grace's life, which cites anecdote after anecdote of strange phenomena from around the world—girls raised by wolves, people who burst into flames and a half-chicken, half-boy baby who pecks his mother to death.

Grace herself is a mini-*Encyclopedia of the Unexplained*. She torments Becky, the blind girl next door: "I closed my eyes and tilted my arms like wings. I flew toward Becky, knocking her to the floor.

|                                                                                    |                                                                                                   |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
|  | <p><b>Last Things</b><br/>By Jenny Offill<br/>Farrar, Straus &amp; Giroux<br/>272 pages, \$23</p> |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|

free-spirited mother's slow descent into madness; her babysitter's transformation from genius geek to existential rebel; and her father's retreating role from family man to TV personality. As readers, we recognize these things for what they are, but at the same time understand what it is to see through the powerless and accepting eyes of a child.

Grace's mother, Anna, dominates Grace's life, as do many mothers of 8-year-old children. An avid and quixotic storyteller, Anna Davitt fills Grace's mind with strange tales of African cities that never sleep, a Loch Ness-like monster that inhabits a nearby lake, and the world of secret spies and coded messages: "She showed me how to send secret messages by underlining words in a newspaper and dropping it on a bench ... Someone is after you ... Meet me on the moon." But Anna is also an ornithologist by profession and imparts a scientific understanding of the universe and our place in it: "If one day equaled the age of the universe, all of recorded history would be no more than ten seconds," she tells Grace.

Anna's free-flowing imagination

'I'm as blind as a bat,' I told her, giggling." And in a re-enactment of a trick that Alec plays on her, Grace lures Becky away from her own birthday party during a scavenger hunt, and locks her up in a dog house, terrorizing the girl without awareness or remorse.

In *The Encyclopedia of the Unexplained*, she reads a strange story about William X, who believed his wife had been replaced with a look-alike witch who turned his real wife into a mouse. Thus suggested, Grace begins to suspect imposters around her: "I looked at the back of Edgar's head. I had a suspicion that this might not be the real Edgar at all, but an imposter who looked exactly like him." So she decides to "build a trap to keep him in until I could prove he wasn't the real Edgar at all." Grace sets her trap, but sits silently by as she sees her own mother fall into the pit she has dug. In an even stranger impulse, Grace covers up any trace of the hole after her mother runs away in fright.

An unexplained tendency for kleptomania also appears. Grace steals a ruler, two finger puppets, 34 gold stars, a box of paper clips and pennies her class had

### A first novel depicting a child's view of rationality and madness.

"collected for the Ethiopians." Her teacher politely explains to Anna Davitt that Grace does not seem to "grasp the notion of private property." These are just a few of the incidents that Offill presents to suggest the inscrutability of the child-mind, or more specifically the child-motive. Many times Grace seems every bit as mysterious as her mystical, story-weaving mother.

Things fall apart for the Davitt family when mid-life crisis strikes Mr. Science, Jonathan's twin brother, who runs off to Florida, leaving his wife and children. Jonathan decides to take over as Mr. Science—the man who has all the answers. The irony of Mr. Science is made all too apparent by the two most notable elements of the show: "the question girl" who can recite the theory of relativity while twirling on roller skates, and Mr. Science's signature blue-colored contacts. Science, in this light, seems trivial and a sham.

When her husband defies her and goes to New York to become the next Mr. Science, Anna becomes unmoored, sliding into dementia. Meanwhile, Jonathan is the epitome of calm, television success—blue contacts and all. With no plan and little money, Anna takes herself and Grace away from their idyllic Vermont home, traversing through the country, hanging out at bars like the Bitter End in New Orleans and making a pilgrimage to Joshua Tree, Calif., to seek a lost lover, and end up at the Burning Man festival in the Nevada desert.

The purposelessness of their travels is reminiscent of Humbert Humbert's cross-country journey with Lolita—a succession of bad hotels and rootlessness that depict a disjointed montage of American life. With each change of scenery, and decreasing funds, Anna's mental deterioration seems to quicken. Grace narrates: "In supermarkets, we listened for the voices of the dead animals calling to us. We drank only rainwater that she collected in a can by the side of the road. The hungrier we got, the more superstitious. We ate only bread that came in the package with the star. 'We're evolving,' my mother said. 'Soon we'll need nothing but air to live.' " Eventually, Anna's madness becomes irrevocable.

It is perhaps this turn of events that is the most striking—that the female spirit, full of verve and mystery, turns delirious without the counterbalance of the rational male. Does Offill mean that the evolution from childhood to adulthood necessitates the death of the female, the death of imagination and the ascendancy of a linear, unambiguous male world order? If so, then these notions of male and female identity, however Shakespearian, are too conventional to be satisfying. Additionally, while Offill's Grace Davitt is a memorable child, she is, as children often are, somewhat inscrutable to the adult reader. This realistic narrative device at times masks a hollowness of character. Still, *Last Things* presents the lost pleasures, angst and mysteries of childhood in an often luminous and humorous way. The lilting imagery and language make it a memorable first novel. ■

Lark Park writes on business, science and culture and lives near San Francisco.

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# The Big Idea

By Jefferson Decker

**T**homas Geoghegan has an uncanny knack for writing terribly unfashionable books. In 1991, the Chicago lawyer published *Which Side Are You On?*, his memoir of the American labor movement. At that moment, unions hardly could have been in worse shape: The Reagan revolution had wreaked havoc on labor law and the AFL-CIO was suffering under the static leadership of Lane Kirkland. Yet Geoghegan offered a passionate defense of what he called “dumb, stupid, organized labor,” and the hope that one day—with a little more union democracy—the tide could be turned. In 1999, Geoghegan’s tastes are no less out of date. In an era of declining voter turnout, scandal *du jour* politics and widespread public cynicism, Geoghegan

**T**he *Secret Lives of Citizens* begins with something of a news flash: These days, Tom Geoghegan, long-time liberal activist, rarely makes it to meetings. Geoghegan has one of the longest political resumes in the Midwest: cub reporter for *The New Republic*, Energy Department lawyer, Chicago-based labor attorney. (For the past 20 years, he has been the guy who files the class-action lawsuit against gun distributors or takes up the quixotic campaign for stricter child labor laws in American cities.) Now he’s too busy jogging. He’s not the only one. “I can go over to Lake Shore Drive, and see people like buffalo in Nikes thundering up the cinder paths,” he writes. “What are they running from? They’re running from meetings.”

Probably not. Geoghegan’s strength as a writer isn’t so much analytical grace—jogging hasn’t caused voter turnout to reach new lows or newspaper readership to decline—but vividness of observation. He weaves together memoir, reportage and policy analy-

sis, often in the same paragraph. He drops the names of great books and big thinkers with unpretentious ease; the wisdom of Aristotle appears, as if out of nowhere, on the streets of Chicago. The effect is to take abstract social issues and stamp them with a personal meaning. A comment about income inequality in Chicago turns into a probing question of identity: “One half: Girls, in tennis whites, dawdling over cat calendars. The other half: Babies, in crack houses, sitting in feces. I feel at times split in half myself. But is it the city’s fault I’m split like this, or is it really mine?” *Secret Lives* is filled with such rambling thoughts, and its argument emerges from them.

As Geoghegan recounts it, he was born to be some sort of civil servant. His grade-school teachers told him as much, and his traditional eighth-grade class trip to Washington, in 1962, confirmed it. While his classmates hung around the hotel, an aunt spirited away young Tom so he could meet his uncle, a lawyer at the Department of Justice. It was late at

night, almost midnight, but the uncle was still there. Geoghegan arrived in awe: “It was a dream to be here, a boy, in the dark, next to Athena in the lobby ... wow!” He got more excited when he found out why his uncle was working all night. “We took the elevator up and up and ... a blaze of light! Young lawyers, white shirts, picking up phones. That very night they were sending federal marshals into the South.” Public service is supposed to be like this. In Alabama, they were turning dogs and hoses on black kids. In Washington, young white men were staying up all night, trying to figure out how to make it stop.

Geoghegan grew up, got his law degree and returned to Washington. During the Carter administration, he took a job in the Department of Energy, hoping to be something of a “New Dealer” like his heroes Rexford Tugwell and Harold Ickes Sr. It didn’t work out. His colleagues drafted bill after bill, only to see them shot down in the Senate. Then the Iranian Revolution—with the subsequent oil shocks and inflation—laid waste to the administration’s agenda. Rather than trying to come up with new ways to make government work, his colleagues tried to get it out of the way. “I became very morose,” Geoghegan writes. “All we did was deregulate. And work.” Faced with a job that no longer seemed to matter, he moved on.

**S**o, he settled in Chicago, did private-sector work as a labor lawyer and contented himself to be a local citizen instead of a national servant. As in D.C., his sense of public commitment was inspired, in part, by a powerful introduction. In this case, the setting was a union hall. Geoghegan was speaking about a case when a mayoral candidate named Harold Washington interrupted. “I saw four blacks in London Fogs,” Geoghegan recalls. Washington “was the shortest of the four. Up they came; not bow ties like Black Muslims, but suits like Loop lawyers.” After a brief, scathing speech, the candidate started introducing himself. “He turned. Big grin. ‘What’s your name?’ I was the only other guy up there in a coat and tie. ‘Oh,’ he said, ‘that’s an Irish name, isn’t it?’ ... Later, I found out, he thought most white people’s names were Irish names.”

That didn’t matter. Geoghegan was hooked. He joined the campaign, banged on doors and got out the vote.



**The Secret Lives of Citizens:  
Pursuing the Promise of  
American Life**  
By Thomas Geoghegan  
Pantheon Books  
256 pages, \$25

has written a book about the virtues of citizenship and public commitment. In comparison, the previous book looks positively hip.

True, there is no shortage of book-length treatments of American malaise. Authors publish jeremiads against the corrupting influence of lobbyists, failed government programs and the adversarial culture of the American media. Academics prescribe cures, from electronic town meetings to bowling leagues. Memoirists detail disillusionment—after years of broken promises—with a political party, movement or leader. But to my knowledge, nobody has put forth the paradoxical argument made by Geoghegan: The problem in American politics isn’t that the politicians break too many promises, but that they make too few. Or, more to the point, that they have lost sight of the one big promise, the “national idea” that sustained American citizenship for decades.

Washington became Chicago's first black mayor; Geoghegan had his most intense moments as a citizen. That happened not only because Geoghegan could endorse Washington's political strategy—basically, expanding his base by mobilizing poor blacks—but because Washington had a use for anyone who wanted to become part of the organization. "Here's what I got out of [the Washington campaign]," Geoghegan writes, "Though I was just a citizen, Harold gave me something to do."

Such moments have been hard to come by since then. Geoghegan describes an earnest effort to host a fundraising "coffee" for a local candidate—a doctor from his neighborhood. So Geoghegan invites dozens of acquaintances, serves java and ends up contributing half of the afternoon's take himself. He doesn't feel good about any of it. "I suppose a civics class today would have to teach a child to raise money," he muses. "The consultant stands there, in huge Magic Marker:

1. Identify. List your twenty-five wealthiest friends.
2. Cultivate. Take them to lunch.
3. Solicit. Ask. Give a dollar amount.

These aren't idle feelings. No grade-school field-tripper stares up at the Capitol Building and thinks kaffeeklatch. But what is at the root of the problem?

For one thing, President Clinton (and, for that matter, current Chicago Mayor Richie Daley) run efficient machines, leaving less work to citizens—and, therefore, chance. Geoghegan, however, thinks the problem runs deeper than that. He cites Herbert Croly, the early 20th century journalist whose book, *The Promise of American Life*, was a bible for Progressive-era reformers. Croly suggested that raising the standard of living for all Americans is the "national idea" of the United States, that the American social contract is based on the promise that life will keep getting better. That is a promise that contemporary mayors, dependent on state governments for support and funding, cannot make. And it is a problem that Clinton-era Democrats have been unwilling, or unable, to address on a large scale. That may be the reality. But what then? Why do the hard work of citizenship when nobody believes that things are going to get better as a result?

There is an obvious libertarian response to all this: Government is helping us much more by staying out of the

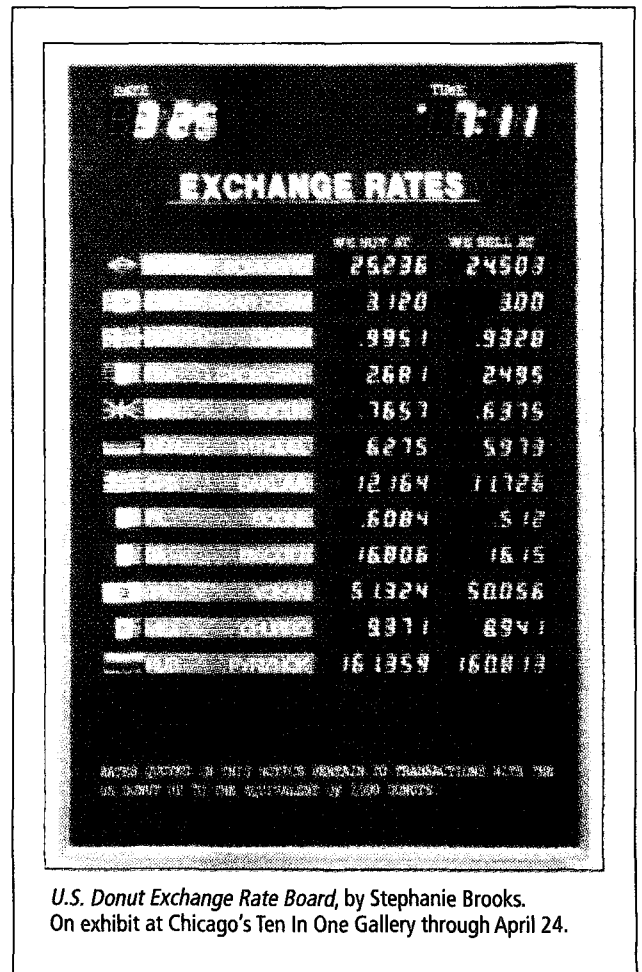
way; lawsuit-happy liberals contribute more to the public good by jogging along Lake Michigan than by filing another class-action. Unfortunately these "Ayn Rand types," as Geoghegan calls them, are legion. And *Secret Lives* flits from topic to topic without really arguing back at them. Worse, Geoghegan sometimes seizes on social markers to make intellectual distinctions. Typically, Geoghegan is a generous writer: *Which Side Are You On?* makes you feel for the most corrupt Teamster official, even as the old hack steals an election from one of Geoghegan's clients. But in *Secret Lives*, he can be tough on whole groups of people, especially young ones. "The kids," he complains, "being here, and not voting, they've taken the punch out of the city. ... They roam from noodle shop to noodle shop, they don't know the number of their wards." His strangest gripe is about suburban parents. "Who are their friends?" Geoghegan quotes an acquaintance. "It's the parents of their children's friends, you know, isn't that awful?" How odd! Must the good citizen be a Shaker? Or single?

Of course, Geoghegan isn't writing for yuppies or the Cato Institute so much as other American liberals. *Secret Lives* is, at heart, a subtle critique of one form of liberal thinking: the New Democratic notion that liberals in the late-'60s "overpromised" by declaring wars (on poverty, for example) that they were unable to win. For Clinton and Gore, that is the secret cause of America's cynicism with government and the *raison d'être* for a now-familiar form of governance—the melange of small-scale programs and slogans like "Practical Idealism" that have become the Clinton agenda. For Geoghegan, the problem is reversed: without the promises, what to do?

I'm not convinced that either analysis is

completely right. Clinton's moves to the center have narrowed the space for left-liberal political activism, but they have not exactly debilitated democracy. In fact, since the 1995 government shutdown Americans' faith in the government's ability to do good has seemed, for the time being, secure. But having restored that faith, the Clinton administration has done little with it, especially in regards to income inequality in the United States. Geoghegan, in a series of strong anecdotes, provides a sense of the problem: A wild ambulance ride through the West Side of Chicago captures the depths of poverty and the pervasiveness of crime in America's inner cities; a tour of Chicago's Night Narcotics Court reveals the dead ends of the drug war. It matters less what we blame: broken promises or promises never made. Either way, America needs citizens who can do something about it. ■

Jefferson Decker, former culture editor of *In These Times*, is the managing editor of *Boston Review*.





# American Gothic

By Scott McLemee

**T**urn back the clock 200 years, and suppose yourself to be that still-new thing in the world, an American citizen. ("Citizen" necessarily implies that you are white and male, so make any imaginative adjustments required.) There is a good chance you are worried about foreign influences—subverting not just the country, but civilization itself. For instance, a publisher has just issued the U.S. edition of a book by William Godwin, the English radical, concerning his late wife Mary Wollstonecraft, authoress of *A Vindication of the Rights of Women*. An American writer recently has penned a satire on her—a witty essay about the threat of dictatorship by

sway." Now, as retired president, he has written to Rev. Morse to thank him for his sounding an alarm against Illuminati subversion—an important issue in the 1798 elections. The reverend himself is a respected figure: the author of treatises on American geography used in schools and known to everyone. Morse's work feeds our sense of national identity—and reminds us how much of the continent has yet to be subdued. More books of this type would be a fine thing. Instead, there are the productions of Charles Brockden Brown—a young writer too much influenced by the most unwholesome trends in foreign literature. His new novel *Wieland* opens with a religious fanatic

mysteriously bursting into flames. Then it gets even weirder. Brown is prolific, and his work swarms with "nightmares of depravity"—to use a phrase coined in the

distant future (by someone attacking a place called Hollywood).

As if all this weren't bad enough, irresponsible journalists, exploiting the freedom of the press, will soon be discussing the sex life of the president: Partisan bickering leads to hints at "damning proofs" of Thomas Jefferson's disgraceful conduct with a slave girl.

A new century dawns. And the country is going to hell in a handbasket.

**F**ast forward two centuries. You hear complaints about "femi-nazis" and the New World Order; about media sensationalism and the all-pervasive culture rot. It's *deja vu*, all over again.

Even that novel, *Wieland*, had something of a 1990s "feel." Following the episode of spontaneous human combustion in chapter one, you find anxiety over sexual harassment, an immigrant who is conspicuously underemployed and a guy who slaughters his wife and children at the behest of disembodied voices. Throw in a couple of FBI agents, and it could be an episode of *The X-Files*.

So it seems like an excellent time to revive Charles Brockden Brown's repu-

tation—though that is unlikely. Brown never had much of a reputation to begin with, at least in America. The first professional novelist in the United States, his work strikingly anticipates that of Edgar Allan Poe a few decades later. Both writers possessed morbid sensibilities and unusually sharp minds. As much as they tried to shock readers, they were also intellectuals, and terribly self-conscious about aesthetic questions. Unfortunately, the parallels continue. Both were, for the most part, neglected by American readers, and had to struggle just to get by—writing more than they should have, and earning less than they needed. Each died ridiculously young. Their renown among literary people abroad didn't mean that much; most of it was posthumous.

If Brown's place in American cultural history is far smaller, that is not too unjust; Poe was by far the better writer. Still, it is fitting that the earlier man now has been honored with an entry in the Library of America, the scholarly and prestigious publisher of canonical authors. *Three Gothic Novels* collects the majority of the fiction Brown published between 1798 and 1800, at the peak of his career. The book itself is handsome, even monumental.

That being said, however, some complaints must be registered. Only one volume of Brown's writings will appear in the Library, so selection is everything. Brown's two novels from 1801 have been excluded, which is OK, because no one has ever actually read them. (Possible exceptions: Ph.D. candidates and people facing long stints in the prison library.) Other omissions are less justified. There is a certain lack of adventurousness in the editing of *Three Gothic Novels*, beginning with the title itself. If Charles Brockden Brown has any reputation at all today, it is as the American writer of Gothic fiction. And so he was. But he was more than that.

**B**orn in 1771 to an industrious family of Quaker merchants, Brown grew up in Philadelphia during an era of financial crisis: Paper money in the new republic was subject to severe inflation. Brown was a sickly child, which probably spared him from being thrown into the labor market at the usual age. He was also intellectually precocious and remarkably well-read. At 14, he began writing a series of epic poems about the conquest



**Three Gothic Novels: *Wieland*,  
*Arthur Mervyn* and *Edgar Huntly***  
By Charles Brockden Brown  
Library of America  
914 pages, \$35

petticoats. The notion of female equality is, of course, insane; yet the memoir by Wollstonecraft's husband is even worse. Although she committed immoralities with other men, Godwin still loves the slut!

Still more troubling are the revelations made in some recent sermons by the Rev. Jedidiah Morse, who has called for vigilance against an abominable secret society, the Illuminati. According to Rev. Morse, the Illuminati consider Reason the sole tribunal of human conduct. They will abolish religion, and overthrow the governments of the world. The group, founded in Bavaria in 1776, supposedly had been destroyed by the authorities some years ago. In fact, says Rev. Morse, it merely went further underground. It launched the French Revolution. And it has been operating in the United States since 1786. Everyone, but everyone, is talking about the Illuminati.

In the old days, General Washington had warned against Britain's "regular, systematic plan" to reduce the colonists to slaves, "as tame and abject as the blacks we rule over with such arbitrary

of America. ("Fortunately for him," one scholar dryly notes, "no vestige of these now remains.") He set himself the goal of mastering all branches of human learning, and was determined to become a great man of letters.

His parents figured that, in the meantime, he should "read law"—that is, serve an apprenticeship in an attorney's office, doing secretarial work and digesting Blackstone's *Commentaries*. Brown did his work well, and hated every minute of it. After three years of "scrawling and jargon" (as he later called it), he abandoned the legal profession and threw himself into writerly pursuits.

He spent his early twenties attending meetings of cultural groups, and publishing the occasional poem or essay. The narrator in one of his early works might well speak for Brown himself: "My trade preserves me from starving and nakedness, but not from the discomforts of scarcity, or the disgrace of shabbiness." Meanwhile, he was falling in love as often as possible—usually unrequitedly, and always over the objections of his parents.

All this frustration, vocational and erotic, landed Brown into a severe personal crisis. He spent a lot of time taking solitary walks, and writing introspective essays in his notebook. He also read avant-garde theoretical texts—among them, William Godwin's *Political Justice*, which demonstrated the necessity of abolishing all merely traditional social arrangements, such as the state, marriage and private property. His temperament made Brown a ready convert to Godwin's philosophy. Anarchism would be far preferable to what Brown called "the rubbish of law ... [with] its endless tautologies, its impertinent circuities, its lying assertions and hateful artifices."

Meanwhile, friends were growing irritated with Brown's tendency to announce projects that never quite got finished. They must have been surprised, then, in more ways than one, when he published *Alcuin* (1798)—a dialogue between a schoolteacher and the feminist he meets at a social gathering. She delivers a well-argued case for full political, economic and social equality for women. And the tepidly liberal man finds himself conceding more and more—until the specter of full sexual liberty for women comes up. At this, the male character flinches.

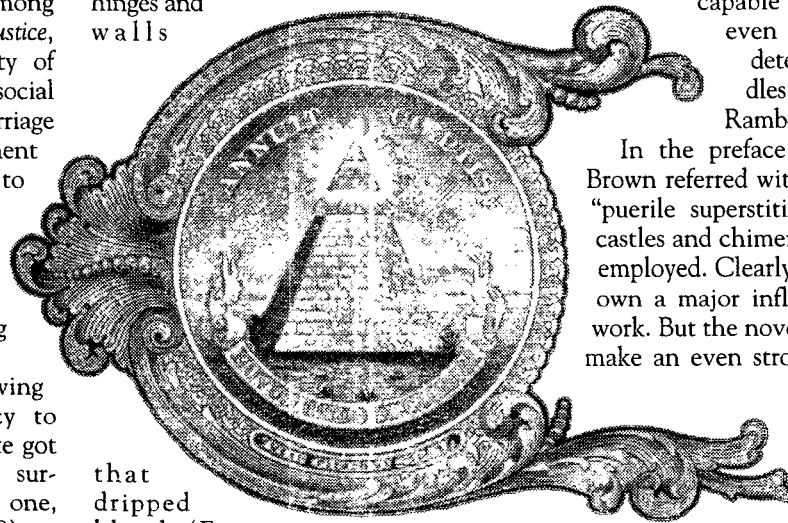
And Brown's prose grows jittery, too: His writing takes the author to the limit of what he can imagine, and it scares him. (That this dialogue does not appear in the Library of America volume is incomprehensible.)

Perhaps *Alcuin* was the turning point. *Something* must have clicked. Over the next several years, Brown turned out four novels, some short fiction and many

### In Charles Brockden Brown's America, money and conspiracy go hand in hand.

reviews and essays for magazines (some of which Brown himself edited). Recycling ideas from unfinished projects during his more easygoing days, he wrote like a man possessed. Whether from a quirk of personality, or out of a sense of what might interest the public—or, most likely, both—he began to experiment with the formulae of Gothic fiction, the literary craze of the 1790s that fascinated readers on both sides of the Atlantic.

Gothic novels tended to be populated by melancholy aristocrats living in ruined castles with creaky door hinges and walls



that dripped blood. (For variety, it might be a sinister monk and a ruined abbey.) Hidden passageways led the heroine—who was virginal, and entirely too curious for her own good—down to subterranean chambers full of skeletons and phantoms and mysterious old manuscripts. The atmosphere was charged with the possibility of really interesting perversion.

Today, these novels are difficult to read without laughing. (Or falling asleep; the horrors get pretty repetitive.) But not long after the French Revolution broke out, they became wildly popular, which was perhaps not such a coincidence. In essence, the Gothic was an erotic fantasy about class: a literary daydream (as coherent and plausible as daydreams tend to be) about how menacing and wicked the aristocracy must be.

To write Gothic fiction set in the United States was no easy matter; for one thing, there weren't any castles. Brown finessed this in *Wieland*, his first novel, by situating the action on a secluded country estate. *Edgar Huntly* (1799) went much further in Americanizing the formula. The standard Gothic sub-basement—where the heroine finds her virtue menaced, vaguely and at great length—was transformed into a cave deep in the wilderness. The narrator is a sleepwalker, tormented by financial and other worries. After one nocturnal ramble, he awakens in pitch darkness, terribly confused, facing not only a wild panther but an Indian war party guarding the mouth of the cave. Much bloodshed follows. He eats raw panther ("No alternative was offered, and hunger was capable to be appeased, even by a banquet so detestable") and handles the Indians with Rambo-like efficiency.

In the preface to *Edgar Huntly*, Brown referred with contempt to the "puerile superstitions" and "Gothic castles and chimeras" other novelists employed. Clearly, he wanted to disown a major influence on his own work. But the novelist was anxious to make an even stronger claim for his own originality.

His work embodied something distinctly American. "New springs of action, and new motives to curiosity ... opened to us by our own country" awaited the literary artist; the circumstances and themes would "differ essentially from those which exist in Europe."

It was a declaration of cultural independence. Yet Brown's attitude toward his own country was highly ambivalent. This is reflected in a short piece



that appeared in May 1799 (and neglected by the Library of America editors, like the rest of his essays). "The settlement of North America," Brown wrote, "is, in its consequence, the greatest event in the history of mankind, and yet it arose the most perverse habits, and the most sordid passions incident to man." And the most sordid and pervasive of all, to Brown's mind, was greed—the motive driving his countrymen, to the detriment (and sometimes to the exclusion) of all others.

Now the world of commerce was, in a sense, precisely what the gloomy walls of a Gothic castle sealed out—the better to focus a reader's attention on the psychosexual thrills within. Brown managed to do something that violates the form's most basic protocol. He created an American sub-genre: capitalist Gothic. With *Ormond* (1799) and *Arthur Mervyn* (1799-1800), he portrays the society taking shape around him as something dangerous and spooky—and in the public sphere, as much as anywhere. The culture of the marketplace contains as many trap doors and secret rooms as anything in Ann Radcliffe's novels.

In Brown's America, money and conspiracy go hand in hand. Each is a form of manipulation, a kind of power—for which truth is, at most, an operating expense. The likeable young go-getter who starts work at a pharmacy in the opening pages of *Ormond* proves to be a skilled forger; he embezzles every cent. In *Arthur Mervyn* (set in Philadelphia during the yellow fever epidemic of 1793) the title character seems to embody all the virtues of Ben Franklin—bright as a new penny, and guided by notions of self-improvement. He does get involved in a shady business transaction. But at heart, he's a good guy. Or is he? The reader never quite determines. And I suspect Brown wasn't entirely sure either.

In *The Wealth of Nations*, Adam Smith says of businessmen that they seldom gather in private without hatching some conspiracy against their customers. That was certainly Charles Brockden Brown's attitude. (He may well have come across the remark in the course of his far-flung reading). In any case, his writing suggests that Brown's discontent with the manipulative and deceptive world of mercantile capitalism had a curious underside. He wondered if it might be possible, as the saying goes, to fight fire with fire.

In his earliest fiction, there are a couple of intriguing figures who don't quite fit into the American scene around them. One is Carwin—the shadowy drifter whose ventriloquism sets the plot of *Wieland* in motion. The other is the title character in *Ormond*. Each character sounds like a projection of the author's own wish-fulfillment fantasies. They possess wonderfully powerful minds and devilish good looks. They care little for money, and their attitude toward sex is

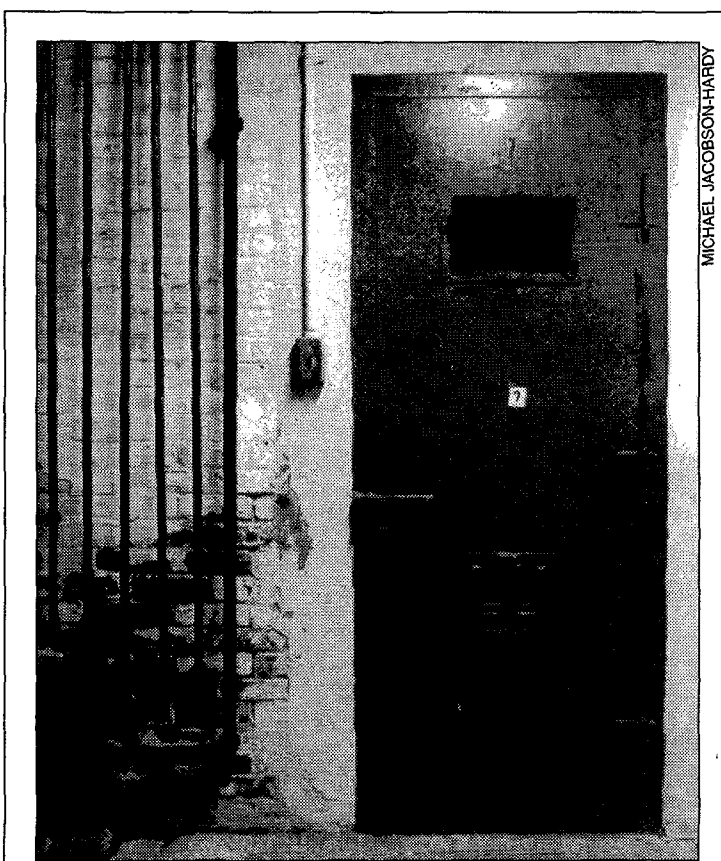
disdainful, perhaps because women tend to swoon in their presence. But what makes Carwin and Ormond really intriguing are their membership in an international secret society of brilliant intellectuals and free spirits. They intend, in due course, to establish a utopian order based on the highest ideals. They practice a certain amount of secrecy and deception—but then, the world is not quite ready to know of their plans.

Brown was fascinated by this notion of a revolutionary secret society. He even started to write another novel in which Carwin would explain its operations, and how he had come to join it. Those who saw this work-in-progress had no doubt about the direction Brown's daydreams were headed. "As far as he has gone," one friend noted, "he has done well; he has taken up the schemes of the Illuminati."

The choice of words was interesting. Throughout New England, journalists and politicians were fueling a proto-McCarthyist hysteria over infiltration by the Illuminati. Brown's decision to "take up the schemes" of the group as a subject for fiction might have impressed his friend as a canny move for a writer trying to win an audience. At the same time, Brown was a social critic, of however confused a sort. Anyone learning of his Godwinite radicalism might have assumed he had indeed "taken up the schemes of the Illuminati" in the most alarming sense.

It was only a fantasy, of course. And a rather guilty one at that. His Illuminati-type characters make him somewhat nervous—just as the prospect of complete sexual freedom for women had. Carwin and Ormond both end up corrupted by the power and deceptiveness of their activity. But like Milton's devil in *Paradise Lost*, they are the most interesting characters the author ever created. ■

Scott McLemee is at work on a book, *Where the Pyramid Meets the Eye: The Conspiratorial Imagination in American Culture*.



Isolation unit no longer in use at MCI-Framingham, Massachusetts, 1992, from *Behind the Razor Wire: Portrait of a Contemporary American Prison System* by Michael Jacobson-Hardy (New York Univ. Press).

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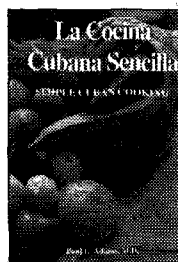


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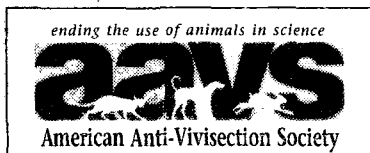
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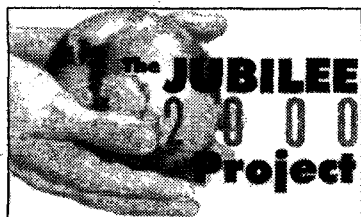


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